

Let's Be Alone Together

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Let's Be Alone Together

by [Poker](#)

Summary

On top of the pillar, Tommy chooses life and leaps for the water, ready to leave exile behind. At that same moment, the server backs up as he falls, suspending him between life and death and the ensuing glitch pushes him from one server to another.

The Hermits have built a little family on their server, bonded through past trauma and instincts. So when a traumatized and scarred teenager crashes in, they're happy to step up and be the family he needs.

Even if he doesn't want them to be.

Notes

Title is from Fall Out Boy's "Alone Together"

Me, holding a pure Hermitcraft AU with Hermit Tommy: This is Nice
Me, sets it down and grabs dark Hermitcraft: But I like this

General Warnings: This is gonna be pretty dark. In this au, the combination of trauma and isolation means that the Hermits have kind of skewed ideas of therapy and how they approach trauma. You do not have to read if you don't like it and I encourage you to back out if you feel uncomfortable. Please read the tags.

Chapter Warnings: Mild Suicidal Thoughts until **A splash. A dark shape cutting through the water.**. Involuntary drug use (Tommy is knocked out using a weakness potion)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

A New Beginning

“Dream is not my friend.” He whispered. “He’s- He’s just watching me.” The words shattered the fragile peace he had built and Tommy let himself crumble, pressing his face into his hands. This shouldn’t hurt him so much. He was a big man, he and Dream had fought before. He should know Dream wasn’t his friend. Should scream it loud and proud like he did before. Dream wasn’t his friend.

Nobody was. He was alone. High up on the tower he had built in a fit of fury and sorrow at losing everything he had worked for.

With one wrong move, he’d fall. The tower he had built was massive, high enough that the ground below was just a smear of green. If he looked down, he knew he would see the crater of his home prison.

Would anyone find him? Would anyone care to look? Would they build him a memorial like they did for Wilbur, host a funeral? Think about the boy he was and say “oh man, we should have been better friends. Tommy was so cool”?

Or would his body rot in dust at the base of the pillar? Alone and forgotten forever while the world kept on spinning?

Tubbo was off doing presidential shit with Ranboo, Fundy, and Quackity, and yeah, Ranboo had visited but those were pity visits. And he didn’t visit anymore. His letters had gone unanswered for weeks.

Jack was- Jack wasn’t coming back. If he had ever visited in the first place, the day had seemed to go by in a blur. Technoblade had shown up to mock him and then leave without a care in the world like the fucker he was. Any pity visits had stopped a long time ago. Philza hadn’t even bothered to show up because why would he? Tommy was just some random kid Wilbur took pity on, decided to take under his wing. A little toy that deluded himself that the three had actually cared about them, that when they said family, they had meant it.

MD and Wilbur were dead.

Ghostbur was gone. The smears of blue had faded from his camp long before the explosion tore it apart.

Who would look for him?

Dream would, a little voice whispered in the back of his mind, he’d come look for you.

“Because he’s fucking with me.” Tommy whispered as if saying it would make it feel more true. “I’m like a fucking toy or something to him. He said it himself.”

He rocked slightly, thinking it over. Uncaring of how it made him wobble, that one wrong movement would send him over the edge. What was he supposed to do now? He couldn’t go

back to L'manburg because he had been exiled. They'd kill him. Dream would kill him. But he couldn't stay here.

He wasn't going to let Dream mess him up more. Wasn't going to give the bastard the satisfaction of pushing him around, saying things and expecting him to hop to it like a fucking dog. This exile was never going to end as long as Dream thought messing with his head was unfunny. He knew the bastard wouldn't let it end.

But where did that leave him? Tommy let out a shaky breath, looking down at the ground below.

He didn't know where to go next. He could go down, let the fall take him to Wilbur. But. Dying meant that Dream would win. Forever, because he couldn't play the game any longer. Couldn't protect his friends until they wised up and realized that as long as Dream was around, the war that began with a Declaration of Independence would never really end.

But where to go next? What to do?

"He'd be so pissed if I ran away." Tommy said, the idea dawning on him. He could almost see Dream throwing a bitch fit in his mind's eye, standing in the center of an empty camp. The thought filled him with delight and revulsion.

"He's not my friend." He reminded himself, shoving down the revulsion. No matter how much that little voice whispered that Dream cared, that he would be worried if he discovered Tommy missing. He wasn't being a bad friend, Dream was. "The fucker doesn't care."

L'Manburg might not want him back but he was a big man! He could leave, build his own bunker. Come back with netherite armor and weapons, better ones this time, and end the war that Dream had started.

He teetered for a moment, looking down at the ground. The view was dizzying. Up here, he could see how small his beach really was, even smaller than L'Manburg when the walls went up. But in L'Manburg, he hadn't felt so trapped.

In Pogtopia, he had.

"I'm not letting him win." Tommy mumbled. His eyes caught on a little patch of blue below, a pond. He knew the one, it was muddy and gross, and he used to use it to take a bath before he started waking up in the ocean and the baths seemed kind of useless.

Now, it looked like the softest landing zone he could see. Tommy took a deep breath, mentally calculating the jump. He could totally make that. He had massive muscles, a little hop like this was a piece of cake.

In. Out. Tommy sucked in a deep breath. And jumped.

His comm beeped.

What the fuck? Tommy's hand started to drift towards it until gravity decided to be a bitch and then it was all he could do to not let the wind ripping by him rip his arm out of his

socket. Distantly, he could hear screaming that definitely wasn't his because it was far too shrill for his manly voice.

He spun in the air, flailing. Green. Blue. Green bluegreenbluegreenblue- he couldn't tell where he was going anymore, if the blue was from the pond or the sky-

Was he going to make it? Tommy squeezed his eyes shut, not wanting to see if he missed, if he jumped wrong.

His outstretched hand brushed against something hard-

Server is backing up. Please remain where you are.

ERROR PLAYER フ・J・J||'リリ' has fallen from a high place. Backup failed.

ERROR. PLAYER フ・J・J||'リリ' has nine hearts. Backup failed.

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Player フ・J・J||'リリ' has joined the game.

The water hits him like a blow, forcing the air out of his lungs.

Tommy choked as he went under, frantically paddling his hands. It was cold, cold enough that after a few seconds, his muscles were already beginning to ache. He choked again as water slipped into his mouth instead of air, disgustingly salty.

With a gasp, his head broke the surface and he frantically paddled to keep it up, his coughing threatening to send him back under.

He choked again as a wave struck him in the face, forcing him back down. The next time he surfaces, he forces his eyes open despite how much the salt burned.

Shock locks his limbs for a moment and it's only his godly reflexes that stop him from slipping under. That and the wave that slaps him in the face because the ocean is a rude ass bitch.

Yeah. The ocean.

Was he hallucinating again? When he jumped, it was into a pond. Not in the middle of the fucking ocean. He had astounding muscles but he was pretty sure he'd notice getting carried out to sea.

...maybe.

For a moment, he treads water, debating what to do. Was it even worth it to swim back? Maybe this was the world telling him it was finally his time. Maybe he should finally sink into the cold darkness and let himself go.

His kicks slowly begin to slow, the water lapping high and higher. The first mouthful grates against an already worn throat and he nearly snaps out of it, nearly deciding it isn't worth it.

But you've already broken your exile, a tiny voice whispered, you're already going to get in trouble. Why not skip that?"

Why not? He was tired of fighting. All of the strength he had scraped together at the top of the pillar was gone now, sapped from him by the cold. There was no way he could swim back to shore even with his massive muscles.

When his head slipped under again, he didn't fight it. It was his time to die.

Tommy tilted his head up, watching how the light danced over the water. A shadow distorted it, twisted it. Were he a more poetic person like Wilbur, he'd list off dramatic metaphors. Something weird like how the shadow in the water was like life or whatever.

But he wasn't. So, instead? He was going to wonder how long it took to drown.

A splash. A dark shape cutting through the water.

Hands wrapped around his shoulders, dragging him up. Tommy struggles but the other person doesn't seem to care, the pull steady as they swam towards the surface. He reached up, yanking at the hands, but they didn't budge.

Was it Dream? Terror made his heart beat fast and he pulled harder, trying to rip their hands off. Had Dream found out what he was trying to do? Was he about to be punished?

Above him, the shadow solidified into the bottom of a wooden boat. Tommy struggled harder. He was ready! It was his time! Gods, just let him go!

And then the hands let go.

He tried to kick away, paddling desperately, but was too late as someone grabbed his shoulders and pulled so hard it felt like they were going to pull his arms out of their sockets. Tommy choked as his head broke the surface of the water, salt water trickling into his eyes.

With one last pull, he was yanked into the boat, choking and spluttering. Warm hands pressed on his chest, forcing him to choke up water until his throat was raw. His eyes stung from the seawater, making the world blurry and indistinct.

“That’s it.” The person murmured. “Easy now. That looks like it hurts.”

“Let go of me!” Tommy howled, twisted in their grip. Screaming tore at his throat, filling his mouth with an acrid tang that didn’t come from seawater but he didn’t give a fuck. He slammed his elbow back, lunging for the side of the boat.

He wasn’t going to let some assholes put their hands all over him. He growled as hands tried to pull him back, kicking and twisting. Someone pushed him back into the boat, making it rock and twist. Blearily, he could see someone in the water, their forearms resting on the side of the boat.

“Calm down!” Tommy snapped, narrowly missing a hand. “Mate, come on, you’re going to go back into the water if you keep fighting like this.”

“Good!” Tommy snapped, trying to head butt them. “Fuck you! Fuck off! Don’t touch me!”

Dimly, he could hear them speaking but he didn’t care. It just went through one ear and out the other. He had to get back to the ocean. He’d rather deal with that than whatever punishment Dream would devise.

“It’s okay, we just want to take you to land.” Hands pressed into his chest, trying to shove him into the other. Tommy threw himself to the side, nearly capsizing the boat.

“I’m not letting you take me back.” He said fervently. The metallic tang in his mouth had gotten stronger and it made him gag, his struggles pausing for a brief moment while his stomach lurched and twisted, trying to throw up but too empty to. He flinched away when a warm hand landed on his back, someone rubbing circles in between his shoulder blades like he was a fucking kid in need of soothing. “Fuckyoufuck-“

“Take a deep breath.” Boat stranger said, their hand staying between his shoulder no matter how much he tried to squirm away. Tommy gagged again before forcing himself to inhale, fighting down the urge to vomit. “Where are you even going, mate? That’s just the ocean and you didn’t seem to be too well at swimming your way to land.”

“Fuck you.” Tommy snarled. “Fuck you, just leave me alone.”

“Grian, he’s not listening.” The stranger in the water groaned, pulling themselves a bit higher, more into the boat. Fuck. “Hit him with the potion, I’m not going to let him drown himself after I pulled him out of there.”

Double fuck.

Tommy screeched, kicking them in the face. There was a shocked gasp and he dove for the other side of the boat. Not today motherfuckers! He was going to escape-

A glass bottle cracked across his head and he gasped as he collapsed to the bottom of the boat, all the strength draining out of his muscles. He wheezed, trying to push himself up, only for his arms to give out halfway and send him crashing back down.

Warm hands slipped underneath him before he could give himself a concussion. They deftly flipped him over and Tommy growled softly as the blurry form of something manhandled his face, tilting it back and forth.

If it wasn't for the weakness potion, he'd kill em.

Fuck. This was- fuck, it was bad. Back in the drug van, they would have called this the good shit. It took a lot to brew a weakness potion that worked so quickly. Wilbur had only ever made one batch of three before shelving the idea of selling them on a larger scale and his brother had been the best brewer ever, second only to his Pog skills.

He'd snuck a sip of one, he remembered hazily. Wanted to show he was a big man after Wilbur teased him by saying he wasn't allowed to try the potions because he was a kid. He'd gotten dizzy and knocked a table over trying to get the bucket of milk he had prepared, the clattering sound alerting Wilbur. The potion cabinet had a lock on it afterwards and he had never seen the weakness potions again. Too hard to make.

Unless you were a fucking cheater loser admin whose name rhymed with meme.

There was- fuck, he knew there was a time frame or something before it fully kicked in. Already he could feel himself getting weaker, weak flails slowing until he trembled at the bottom of the boat. Against his will, he yawned.

A full bottle.

Fuck.

"He doing alright?"

"Oh, he's going under quick." They said, Tommy growled when he saw them lean in, probably checking his eyes or something. There was something that happened in the eyes but he couldn't remember what. They got bigger? Fuck, whatever. "The potion hit him hard. He must sleep less than you do."

"Hey!" Another voice chimed in. "Pot calling the kettle black there."

The boat rocked and Tommy groaned as his stomach lurched again. It felt like the time he had drunk too many strength potions during a fight and made himself sick. Wilbur had laughed at him afterwards, holding his hair back as he puked his guts out. That day felt like it was a million years ago.

He swatted feebly at them when their hands came back, missing by a mile. "Easy there." They said. "You're safe. We're just going to take you to our admin and he can work this out."

Admin. Tommy's mind latched onto that word with the ferocity of a bear. Dream was the admin. He squirmed, trying to pull away with the last of his strength. "No no no, can't see him, don't take me." He pleaded. The words came out in stumbles, slurred and twisted. His tongue felt like it was too big for his mouth.

Dream would be so mad if he knew what he did. And just after he had already messed up. They'd kill him, they really would and he would deserve it because he had been bad-

A glass bottle broke across his chest. Tommy slumped back, feeling woozy. Involuntarily, his eyes closed, his thoughts feeling like they were moving through sludge. "Grian!" The stranger snapped.

"He was panicking! I wasn't going to let him hurt himself or capsize the boat. One more dose shouldn't hurt him. Just make him go to sleep quicker."

The person in the water sighed, all fond exas- exsp- Tommy groaned a bit, his cloudy thoughts not providing the right word. How dare they. He was going to submit a complaint. When he settled back down, it was in somebody's lap, his head cushioned against their chest. Their arms wrapped around him, a comfort and a cage.

"You gotta admit I'm right mate, he's settled down now." Tommy let out a little grumbly sound at the noise, yawning widely. He heard a soft coo, something strangely birdlike that made the back of his head perk up. Wilbur used to do that sometimes when he was happy. It filled his chest with a warm fuzzy feeling. "Aw, did you like that?"

"He's sweet if you ignore that he kicks like a mule." Somebody said. Tommy made another little grumbling sound. He just wanted them to be quiet. He was so tired. So tired. He tried burrowing into whatever he was laying on, ignoring the choked splutters.

"Gods, no, ach, you're wet and freezing." They complained. There was a soft snort.

"Of course, he's wet and freezing. I just pulled him out of the ocean. I'm wet and freezing." They complained. Tommy let out a short whine as he was lifted up, away from the warmth. This had to be illegal. Somebody needed to call the police. He needed that.

"Hey, shush, I'm just trying to keep my wings from getting wet. I don't think you know just how hard it is to clean them." They said. "I'll put you back down in a minute and then we can get you back to land. Gods, you're shivering so much."

Was he shivering? He didn't feeling like he was. Couldn't feel much of anything beyond the warmth. His fingers felt strangely numb and cold seemed to have seeped into every bone in his body. Tommy blinked slowly, his thoughts loose and calm.

"I'll help you preen afterwards. He ready to go? I'm ready to take him back to Xisuma." The stranger said. Ugh, why did they keep talking? Tommy whined as the hands shifted again before hissing in pain as a spark of pain snapped through his body, making him arch and twist away from the twist.

"Oh, well, that's not a good sign." Tommy hissed as warm hands returned to his side. Distantly, he could tell that his shirt was getting lifted up. He tried to swat but it was more of a sleepy fumble, one hand catching his and pressing it back down. "Easy. Mumbo, he's hurt."

"Does he need a potion?" There was the soft hiss of an inhale and Tommy whined as warm hands prodded his side, trying to squirm away. "Grian?"

“Definitely not. You try to put a potion on this and it’ll definitely heal wrong. Let’s get him back home. Doc and Stress can check him over.” The hands carefully pressed him down into a warm chest and Tommy hummed, snuggling into it. Now that was more like it. He was ready for a nice long nap. “There we go. Wait. Uh. How am I going to paddle the boat?”

“I have no idea mate. You have a good time with that.” There was the soft crackle of an explosion and Tommy yelped, lurching away from the warmth in fear. There was- there was something bad about the sound but he couldn’t remember what it was just that he needed to get away right now before it hurt him-

Warm hands pressed him back down. “Easy, easy. It’s gone now.” They said. “Guess it’s just me and you now.”

Tommy hummed in answer, eyes beginning to drift close. He really hoped they weren’t expecting a talk or anything. He was so tired. Just so tired.

“Mate, you’re pretty messed up.” They said with a sigh. One hand lifted away and whatever he was resting on began to rock. Distantly, Tommy could feel a little voice in the back of his head begin to scream. But he didn’t care. This person was so warm and soft and he was so tired.

He felt safe. He didn’t remember when he last felt safe. Didn’t remember if he ever really felt safe. His sleep had been plagued by nightmares of boar masks and burnt wings overshadowing pools of blood. Of yellow boxes and a smiley face. Sleeping was an uncertain, tense process.

But right now? Right now, it felt good. Nice. Tommy pressed his cheek into the soft material of the person’s shirt, letting the rocking lull him and the words wash over him like a wave. Nothing mattered.

“-And that’s coming from me, I thought I held the record, honestly! Don’t tell Xisuma I said that, I don’t want to go to cuddle therapy again because he found out I was joking about that. Got builds to make and pranks to pull off!”

“But anyways, you’re safe now. We’ll help you. You won’t have to ever feel scared or frightened again.”

In the back of his head, something was screaming. But he couldn’t open his eyes. Couldn’t do much at all honestly. Tommy yawned, feeling the rich blackness reach up to take him. How bad could it be?

He just wanted to feel safe again

“You’re one of ours now.”

Tommy came awake to a starburst of pain in his stomach and he groaned, trying to squirm away from prodding hands. It felt like he had only been sleeping for mere moments before getting dragged back to face torture.

Distantly, he felt a hand stroke his cheek. "Its okay." Someone said. He didn't recognize their voice or their thick accent. It sounded like a woman, but he wasn't sure of that either. What he was sure of was that he wanted to go back to sleep and they were interrupting it. "Just hold still, we're not done yet."

Something cold touched his stomach and Tommy whined, trying to squirm away. There was a soft sigh from the lady. "I'll hold him down. You take over from here." Tommy whined again, his heart beginning to beat faster as heavy hands pressed down on his shoulders. There was an answering murmur from above him and Tommy flinched. He didn't recognize that voice either.

This time, when he tried to squirm away at the first spark of cold and pain, the hands pressed down, holding him in place. Tommy weakly snapped at one but all he got was a soft chuckle. "Fierce little one." They said.

He wasn't little! Tommy opened his mouth to tell them this but all that came out was a weak sigh as they pressed down slightly on his stomach. There was a strangely tight feeling there now like the time he had to get stitches in his arm. "How's it looking Stress?" The man said.

"Better. He's still going to have scarring but as long as he goes easy on the exercise and relaxes a bit for a few months, it should heal without any issue. Let's get him in the pajamas we have, I don't like how he's shivering."

Tommy let out a sigh of pure relief as something warm and soft was wrapped around him, his arms gently pulled through the shirt sleeves. It felt so much nicer than before, all soft and cozy. Distantly, he heard someone cooing. "Oh, you're just a soft little kid, aren't you?" The woman cooed. "Just a bit of affection and you melt instantly."

"Grian and Mumbo said he fought them pretty hard. "The other person said. A hand cupped his cheek and Tommy hummed, pressing his face into it. "Got in a couple of good hits too. I already put potions on any bruises they have."

This was a nice dream, he decided. He hadn't like the pain and cold in the beginning, but this? This was nice. He wanted to stay here just a bit longer and not wake up yet.

"Oh, he doesn't look like he could hurt a fly. He's far too skinny." The hand gently stroked his cheek. "I think he's awake enough, we should see if he'll take some food and water. It's risky, but I don't like the idea of letting him sleep it off while hungry and thirsty."

Tommy hummed. Food? Food sounded good. His stomach felt empty, twisting and gnawing. "You don't-" The words came out slurred and twisted. It took too much effort to speak. But he needed to. They needed to know that they- that they didn't have to make themselves care for him. He tried to shift a bit, but the hand moved to his chest, pressing him down.

It might be just a dream but Tommy had learned how he was a bother to most people. He didn't want to bother these people too and have this dream turn into a nightmare.

"Of course, we're feeding you. You don't have to go anywhere." The man rumbled. "Just hold still, and she'll bring it over."

“That’s right.” The woman said with a chuckle, sitting down next to him. He felt the bedsheets move but still, he couldn’t seem to open his eyes. It felt like a herculean task trying to pry them open, the blackness all he could see. Tommy flinched back as something cold pressed against his lips. “Open wide.”

“I’m not a baby.” Tommy whined. He could feed himself. But when he told his arms to move, they didn’t move.

“We know you’re not.” The man said. “But you need to rest. Lie back and let us take care of you.”

Tommy automatically went limp. Did he go too far? Was the happy dream going to fade away now? This time, when the spoon touched his lips, he opened his mouth, obdeiantly eating the food.

He nearly cried out of joy. The food was so delicious, more delicious than anything he had eaten in months. All the stringy meat and dry bread couldn’t even compare. Applesauce, delicately sweet, and with just a bit of a tingle to it. He gulped it down, relishing in the taste. This dream was so much better than he thought.

“Slowly.” The lady admonished. The spoon arrived far too slow for his liking and eventually, he heard the clatter of a bowl being set aside. He was almost grateful for it, he had passed into being full a few bites ago but she had showed no signs of stopping. “Do you have the water?”

“Right here.” The man said. A straw slipped into his mouth but Tommy spat it out. His stomach felt uncomfortably full after the applesauce and this was dream water, it didn’t matter if he drank it or not. “Kid, it’s time to take a drink.”

“No.” Tommy whined. “M full.”

He wanted to go back to sleep. His stomach felt strangely bloated, stretched a bit to far after months of forgetting to eat regularly. He’d say he’d eat and drink once he woke up but he was pretty sure he knew he was lying to himself.

There was a soft sigh and the straw pressed into his mouth again and Tommy flinched as a hand pressed down on top of it. Not enough to stop him from breathing, no, but enough that he couldn’t spit out the straw. “Drink.” They commanded.

Tommy drank.

It tasted fantastic and as soon as he had a sip, he realized how dry his mouth was and how nice the cool, sweet water tasted. Eventually, he must have pleased them and the cup was moved away. Tommy yawned, his stomach feeling overly full and making him sleepy. It was nice but he knew when he woke up, his stomach would be aching again, screaming out for food that he didn’t have the energy to collect.

“There we go.” He heard someone whisper. Soft blankets were tucked in around him and Tommy hummed, snuggling into them. “Time for you to go back to sleep.” Tommy could

barely hear the words, his mind already beginning to fuzz over again.

He didn't want to go to sleep. He clung to this feeling, of being awake and surrounded by safety. Of having soft, warm blankets tucked around him instead of the one scratchy blanket he had crafted that stunk of sheep. He didn't want this dream to end.

"Was the dosage right?" He heard the man ask. "He drank a bit more of the water than I was expecting. Will that throw it off?"

"Perfect. In fact, the water will probably help the potion be a bit more effective" He heard the woman say. "Now we just need to keep an eye on his health and let him sleep off the exhaustion. After that, we'll make plans."

Tommy made a quiet hm sound and was rewarded with a hand in his hair, gently combing through it. "Oh, kid, you need to be sleeping now." He heard something whisper. They gently scratched at his scalp and Tommy hummed. That felt nice. The soft gentle movement finally tipped him over the edge. Before he knew it, he was asleep again.

"It'll take me at least a few hours to identify where he came from." Xisume said, looking at the code between his hands. It broke his heart to see it. The code was hopelessly snarled and twisted, some sections missing and the others shattered remnants of what they should be.

It was like someone had dragged their fingers through every inch of code, weaving in poisonous influence. That could not be healthy. Xisuma frowned down at it. When he adjusted code, he did it with the player's best interest in mind. This work was just sloppy.

"Are you going to send them back?" Grian asked. Xisuma looked up, taking in how they were nervously hunched over in their chair, their colorful wings curled in until they looked far younger than they were.

"Of course not." He rushed to say, dismissing the codes. He strode over to Grian, pressing one hand to the back of the other's neck. It gladdened him to see Grian melt under his touch. It had taken years for Grian to overcome his fearful response to touch but the Hermits had been patient every step of the way. "Why would you think that?"

Grian flinched, looking away. Expecting punishment no doubt. His past admins had been so terrible to him. Xisuma crouched next to him, draping one arm over his shoulder. Grian leaned into it. I know you won't. I'm just- I guess I'm scared."

"Why." Xisuma pressed. Grian had been making such good progress talking to them. This was a good time to reinforce that.

"He's just so skinny and his hands were so messed up. They're filled with so many splinters, it looks like he's just been punching trees instead of using an axe even though everyone knows you should use a tool. And then there's the shrapnel and how easily he fell asleep and-" Grian panted heavily, shaking slightly. Xisuma hummed, glancing up at the door. Doc met his eyes, placing the last potion back on the shelf. Without a word, the creeper hybrid moved over, settling against Grian's other side.

The kid must remind Grian of the before. Before he was safe.

“If he goes back, he’s going to fall and die like a little baby bird getting pushed out of the nest.” Grian mumbled, glancing at the kid. Xisuma couldn’t refute him. At the bare minimum, the admin wasn’t keeping a proper eye on his players. It was one thing to let a few splinters happen, but to not heal them? To not teach them a better way and soothe their wounds?

Despicable.

“You’re safe here.” Doc reminded Grian, resting his chin on top of Grian’s fluffy hair. “We’re not letting him go and we won’t let you go either.”

“Maybe some preening time is in order. Scar and Stress will watch the kid. We’ll head into another room and get you all fixed up. I know you hate it when your feathers are out of place.” Xisuma offered, gently pulling away. Grian flashed him a tight smile.

“Maybe that would help.”

“Besides,” Xisuma continued, a bit more stern. He hated having to use that tone even when he knew it was necessary. But it was necessary and so he needed to use it. “Don’t think I didn’t overhear that comment you made when I thought you weren’t listening. I thought we had worked through this.”

“Grian, really.” Doc said with a sigh, rubbing a hand down their back. “We’re here for you. You don’t have to hide it. We can message some of the others if you want, I know you like having a big group pile.”

“I know, just sometimes-” Grian trailed off, glancing away. “Can’t it wait a bit? I just want to finish some of my projects first. I haven’t even built my nest yet.”

“We can use the nest at my house.” Xisuma said sternly. Grian nodded, glancing at the kid again before pulling away. Xisuma couldn’t help it. He melted a little, ignoring how Doc rolled their eyes. “I just want you to feel safe. If you don’t want to do this, we don’t have to.”

“No, it’s fine. I think I do need this. Seeing the kid’s brought up some of the old stuff I don’t like to think about.” Grian said with a shudder. “A good preening session sounds nice. I’ll call Mumbo and the rest of the crew. But I want to be back here when the kid wakes up.”

“Easy.” Doc said with a snort. “The two potions you gave him hit him hard. Combined that with the malnutrition, the exhaustion from having to take healing potions, and the likely sleep deprivation, I wouldn’t be surprised if he’s out for a few days. You’ll be back with plenty of time. We’ll call them over and get you all sorted out again.”

“Good.” Grian said. “No one should have to wake up alone.”

“He won’t be.” Xisuma promised, stretching out a hand so Grian could pull himself off the chair. “He’s one of ours now. He’ll won’t ever have to worry about being alone again.”

An Unwanted Beginning

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: Illness and mild delirium (Tommy confuses two people for other people), panic attack, forced hug

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy woke to the gentle murmur of words and rustle of pages. Someone was sitting next to him, reading out loud. He couldn't quite hear the words, only the steady rhythm of their voice and the soft sound of them turning the page. He wanted to listen he really did, but-

He squirmed, scrunching up his nose and pressing his head into the blanket. Everything felt too hot. The blankets felt like they were stifling him, smothering him down. He felt like he was going to drown under them or the heat would bake him alive. Whatever came first.

The voice stopped and moments later, a warm hand pressed against his forehead. Tommy tried to squirm away, not liking how hot it felt against his warm skin. "Techno, stop." He mumbled. And then he froze, sweaty limbs trembling.

It felt like ice cold water covered him. Reading. The warmth of their hand. He panted, his heart beginning to speed up. Techno hated him. They had beaten him near to death in that stupid pit and that was just the least of it. He could still see their wild blood red eyes as they raised the wither skull high and shouted at him.

The only time he had seen them since that night was when they turned up at his exile to mock him, looking infuriatingly rich and comfortable. Fucker.

And now he was sick and vulnerable. His arms weren't responding to his frantic commands and his eyes felt like they had been crusted shut. He froze under the warm hand, waiting for the moment that it would be replaced by cold metal.

"Please don't." He whimpered. He hated it, hated how weak he felt. "Please don't hurt me, Techie."

He just wanted to be safe. To be taken care of. To go back to the days when being sick meant that his brother would bundle him up in blankets and Techno would scoff a bit but would always be there when he woke up, reading from the mythology book that he brought everywhere. The other would cover him in gold, and he wouldn't get to leave the nest for days but he missed it. When being sick meant days of lazing around and not days filled with paranoia, waiting for someone to take advantage of his sickness.

"Please." Humiliatingly, he could feel hot tears beginning to streak down his cheeks. He heard someone coo, the hand pulling away.

“You’re fine, little buddy.” They whispered. Was Techno sick as well, Tommy thought dizzily, because his voice didn’t sound quite right. Warm and mellow and deep, without the soft background rumble that came from their piglin heritage. He managed to crack his eyes open, seeing a rich red shirt before they forced themselves closed again. Probably Techno. “Ain’t nobody going to hurt you.”

He let out a fearful whine but stopped squirming. He was rewarded with a soft rumble, not quite right, but familiar enough that Tommy recognized it as ‘calm down’. He melted, trying to follow their hand with his head as they moved away.

It had been so long since Techno had rumbled at him. Since the other had considered him as family, as someone who deserved soft rumbles and head bumps. And he missed it. He missed how comforting it was. And if Techno was offering, surely it would be okay to accept it?

“Aw, you like that?” They said, making another soft rumble. Their hand moved back to his hair, and Tommy melted under the soft scratches. “That’s good, little buddy. I’ll do it as much as you want.”

Tommy would beam if the world didn’t feel like it was getting very spinny. He made a soft noise and the man sighed, the hand returning to his forehead for a moment. He leaned into it, relishing the touch. “I’m sorry little buddy, it looks like you got a fever. I’m going to have to call the healers in, get them to check you over.”

Nooooo! He didn’t want him to go! Tommy gathered the last of the strength he had left, reaching up to grab Techno’s hand. “Stay.” He whispered. He wanted to savor this, even if it might be a hallucination from being sick. He didn’t want it to disappear.

The person froze, their hand steady under his. Tommy tentatively pulled away, his hand falling back to the blankets. Had he made a mistake? Was Techno going to leave him again because he had been bad? Or was he going to get punished for this?

“Oh, no, never.” Techno said, a rumble building in their chest. Had he been mumbling out loud? “I’m never going to punish you and nobody else will either. You’re completely safe. I’ll just use my comm to call them and then I don’t have to go. That’s okay, yes?”

Tommy nodded slowly. Whatever kept this likely hallucination with him. He was rewarded with a hand gently rearranging his blankets and he let out a sigh of relief as the building heat began to ease. “That better?” They cooed. “Being sick is no fun. But it’s okay, we’ll be here to help you.”

“Dun wanna be sick.” Tommy mumbled. Being sick meant having to drag himself outside, blanket wrapped around him, and dragging back a bucket of water so he wouldn’t die. Being sick meant Dream not visiting for weeks.

He had asked them to stay once and they had gotten sad, asking him if they meant so little to him that they wanted to get him sick. They were a busy admin after all. They couldn’t spend days nursing some sickly teenager to health and then dealing with possibly getting sick themselves.

It was selfish and that was bad. He should tell Techno to go or get the hallucination to disperse or something. Drag himself out of bed and get together enough supplies that he wouldn't die because of something so measly as being sick. He remembered having some bread in his chest, forcing it down would suck, not to mention the crumbs that would infest his bed, but it would be better than nothing.

But Tommy couldn't bring himself to say the words. It had been so long since someone had been at his side, taking his temperature and making those rumbles. As if on cue, Techno rumbled again, making an old snort sound. Closer to the yip of a wolf than the snort of a pig. If he was more awake, he'd laugh, tease them about confusing their noises. But everything felt a bit too warm, his head a bit too tight.

Maybe they were sick already. Maybe he wouldn't be selfish then, if Techno decided they would be sick together. Tommy hummed, leaning into the hand. There was a small beeping sound and he flinched slightly, confused.

"That's just Stress." The other hurried to reassure him. Who was Stress? Tommy made a questioning sound but the other didn't answer. He let it drop, too tired to keep chasing it and not wanting to annoy Techno into leaving. The other was practically saintly for deciding to help him right now. He didn't want them to decide that he didn't deserve it, that Tommy was too selfish and bratty to deserve help and love.

Maybe it was Wilbur. Techno always said the other caused him stress. Something in the back of his mind whispered that was wrong but Tommy couldn't quite reach the thought. His head was too fuzzy and felt like it was too hot. Thinking hours were over for the day.

Maybe the entire terrible server had been a dream. They were still home, in the rough little cabin, and Techno and Philza were back from one of their trips. He'd wake up to a family that was whole and happy instead of shattered and filled with icy rage.

"Can you read to me?" He whispered. He liked it when Techno read to him, and liked how they steadily worked through the stories without needing him to talk too much. Talking felt too hard.

"Of course." The other said instantly. He felt their hand pull away and felt a flash of disappointment. At least he didn't feel quite so hot. Their piglin heritage was like touching a furnace. Nice when it was cold out but not nice when it felt like his body was trying to bake itself alive.

There was a soft scratching sound and the rustle of pages turning. After a quiet pause, Techno began to read. He wasn't sure what story it was, really what he craved was the rhythm, the feeling of the other caring for him.

That was a nice dream. He was pretty sure that it wasn't real, that he'd wake up and regret squandering the opportunity to stock up on food and water, but the thought of staying in the dream a bit longer was nice. Tommy yawned, letting the darkness of sleep pull him back under.

When he next awakens, he's freezing cold. His bones were carved out of ice and the cold had sunk all the way to his marrow. His teeth chattered and Tommy curled in on himself, desperately trying to conserve any scraps of warmth he had left.

He heard more than saw the person, how they cursed before cold arms wrapped around him, pulling him into someone's lap. They were just as cold but Tommy clung to them. You were supposed to huddle when you got cold, right? He saw a nature documentary about that once, on one of the big fancy servers with caring mods who did special coding.

Of course, he was pretty sure that worked better if the other was warm too. The person's skin felt like ice, their clothes chilled to the touch.

"Oof, you are not looking too hot." Tommy let out a soft grumbling noise, hearing them laugh in reply. Of course he wasn't looking too hot, he was freezing. Snow was probably spontaneously manifesting around him. Ice cubes were jealous. And this fucker wasn't helping with his too cold arms. "Stress said you were going to be a bit sickly but you shouldn't die."

Stress was a dirty liar. He felt so cold, he might as well be a corpse. Tommy slowly opened eye, looking up at who was holding him. In the dim light of the room, he had to strain to make out any features. Oh.

"I'm dead." He said with a soft hum. It came out as more of a croak. The words rasped on his sore throat and he had to cough to clear the itchy feeling. The arms wrapped around him froze.

"Why do you say that? You're not dead." He said. Tommy wheezed out a laugh.

"I wouldn't be seeing you if I was alive, Wilbur." He whispered. He had seen the brown slightly curly hair, could faintly make out a pale scar on their face before his eyes had reminded him that they would like to be closed again, please and thank you.

"I'm dead?" The words were strangely questioning. Maybe Wilbur had never really believed he could die. Tommy certainly hadn't believed it.

"Yeah." He mumbled, pressing his face into their shirt. It was nice. He wished Wilbur was wearing his sweater, he had missed it.

"How did I die?" They said, Tommy hummed. Did everyone forget how they died? He definitely didn't remember. Maybe it was because he had gotten sick and decided to sleep instead of getting supplies. That sounded likely.

"You blew up L'Manburg." Tommy said with a yawn. "And then asked Phil to kill ya. Remember?"

"Huh." The man said. It wasn't confirmation but Tommy accepted it as one anyways. If the fucker wanted more information, he'd have to remember on his own. It felt like someone had thrown a rave party in his skull and hadn't invited him. He was probably frostbitten by now.

A hand pressed against his forehead. “Oh, kid, you’re burning up.” The man said. Tommy made a disagreeing noise. He definitely wasn’t burning up. He was so cold, scientists were using him to measure how low a human temperature could go for their standardized tests or whatever.

Wilbur laughed. “Time to take your medicine.” They shuffled and Tommy made an angry noise, trying to wriggle under his blankets. He didn’t want to take his medicine, big man didn’t need any medicine! A firm hand reached under, pulling him forward and pressing him back into Wilbur’s lap. “Just a quick sip okay? I know, I know, I don’t like medicine either. But Stress and Doc said you need to take it.”

A cold cup was pressed to his lips but Tommy stubbornly kept his mouth shut. He was already dead, he didn’t need medicine.

“Come on please? For me?” Wilbur coaxed, their voice sounding more strained. “If you take the medicine, I’ll see about getting you another bowl of golden applesauce. You like that stuff, don’t you?”

Oooo. Was that what he had been fed before? That stuff had been tasty as hell. Tommy turned the idea of it over in his head before sighing and opening his mouth. The medicine was slowly tipped in and he grimaced at the acrid taste that swept across his tongue. It tasted like where sweet berries went to die.

“There we go.” Wilbur hummed and Tommy felt a rush of warmth. He had made Wilbur happy. He liked the feeling of it, of having Wilbur be pleased with him. It had been so long. This definitely had to be heaven.

“Now, we just need to get you nice and cozy again! Take it from me, that medicine will knock you out.” Wilbur cheered. Tommy snorted as the blankets were carefully tucked in around him, trying to open his eyes so he could grouch at Wilbur. A hand pressed over his eyes before they could get too far open. “Ah ah ah. You made your eyes pretty sore with that whole falling in the ocean thing. You shouldn’t be exposing them to too much light. Doc would have my head if I let you keep doing that.”

Tommy whined. “But I’m dead. I’ll be fine.” He pointed out. The hand over his eyes stilled but didn’t move away.

“Please? For me?” They whispered. Tommy made a small acquisitory noise, slumping down in the blankets. He didn’t like it when Wilbur was sad. When Wilbur was sad, things got bad again and he didn’t want them to happen. Not again. Death was supposed to be safe and happy, not a repeat of before.

“There we go.” They said as they moved their hand away, “You look so cute like this! Maybe you should be the shopping district’s mascot, you’ll look so cute with your own hat. Maybe a little monocle and sash too.” Tommy hummed. Shopping district? Since when did the server have a shopping district? The closest they had to a shop was Niki’s little bakery and that was gone now.

Maybe he wasn’t dead and instead he was dreaming. That would explain why Wilbur’s here.

Wilbur stilled. “You’re not dead.” He said. His voice was quiet and mellow. Oh. He must have been mumbling again. Now that Tommy was listening, their voice didn’t quite sound right. The accent was just a bit wrong, something about the voice seeming unshakably off. He shoved the thought away. It was probably just because of the dream thing. “And you’re not dreaming.”

“Sure, ‘m not.” Tommy said with a little snort. That’s what a dream would say. Wilbur sighed, rubbing a hand through his hair. Tommy preened under the touch. “You’re definitely not- not fucking dead.”

“Language.” They said. Tommy went into slightly hysterical giggling that quickly trailed into a harsh coughing fit. Wilbur rubbed his back until he was done.

“You being Bad?” He said. His eyes were feeling kind of heavy again. For all the sleeping he had done, it always felt like he was ready for another round. Maybe if he woke up, he’d be less cold. Even with the blankets wrapped around him and Wilbur pressed to his side, he couldn’t escape the chill. He sneezed, grumbling a bit.

“What? I’m not being bad at all.” Wilbur said, confused. Tommy giggled. This Wilbur was silly. Of course he couldn’t get him quite right, not even in his dreams. He couldn’t get anything right.

“Mm, course ya fucking not.” He slurred out.

“We’re really going to need to fix that swearing habit of yours. This is a clean server and Xisuma is not going to like it if he hears you using those words.” Wilbur said. Tommy would roll his eyes if they were open but that felt like far too much effort. Instead, he made a soft humming sound. Whatever. He’d wake up soon. Or he was dead. Either way, it wasn’t his problem.

There was a soft sigh. “Sleep well, kid.” He said. “If this is what you’re like when you’re sick and half asleep, I can’t wait to see what chaos you’ll cause on the server.”

“Night, Wilby.”

Another sigh, the hand returned to his hair, slowly brushing through it. “No point in correcting you, I suppose. You’ll learn my name soon enough.”

The words made him nervous, twitchy. But before Tommy could wake up fully, ask Wilby what was going on and why he had said that, the rich blankness of sleep had dragged him back under.

He dreamed in fits and starts. At times, he could hear Technoblade reading to him. Sometimes, he felt the cold chill of Wilbur by his side, his hand holding his loosely. Other times it was someone gently feeding him applesauce, spooning it down his throat like he was a frail little baby. Once or twice, he saw the flickers of feathers but he sunk back to sleep before he could see Philza.

Other times, it was the sight of code, of the spinning numbers that made up the universe. Tommy liked it when he dreamed about the code. They would twinkle in the blackness above him like his own personal stars. It should have been perfect. But in the background, someone would whisper to him.

They weren't always nice whispers.

Who did this to you? Where are your scars from? Why is your coding so twisted, the numbers so broken? Why did nobody help you?

In those dreams, Tommy would press himself into the ground and shake with the force of holding back his tears. Memories would flicker past, awful scenes playing out in full in front of him as if some twisted audience was pulling out a new film. He didn't like it, the way the memories would even slow down at the worst bits and focus on all that he wanted to forget.

And then there would be that soft sigh and he would know that it was over.

Warm arms would wrap around him and the code above would brighten and the memories would be gone. And then the same voice would be whispering to him again but this time it would be nice whispers. Whispers about how he would never have to go back, that he was safe now, home now.

He didn't believe it. Far too many people had promised to be his home and then broken that promise. Far too many people had tried to help him only to find out how bratty, twisted, and disgustingly needy he was.

He took advantage of people's kindness, attached himself to them like a fucking limpet. Every family after his parents had died had tried and then sent him back, complaining that he was too hard to deal with, too snappy, too prone to whining. He had done it with Wilbur, Philza, and Technoblade and for a while, they had tolerated it. Had said they welcomed it, had met his neediness with every bit of attention he had needed.

And then he drove them away too. None of them acknowledged who they once were, in that golden server before the Dream SMP. Technoblade didn't call him runt and Philza didn't coo and Wilbur's soft lullabies got replaced with war drums and even Tubbo had left him behind, tired of his clinginess.

Dream was the only one left who would try. And Tommy had to try so hard not to ruin it. Had to remember to keep his hands to himself and to not swear too much or get annoyed when Dream started ignoring him. Because those weren't good behaviors. They were annoying.

The coding didn't like it when he thought that. The weight on his limbs would press down, warmth smothering his limbs. Whispering that this time would be forever, that he would never need anyone else.

It was nice. Even if he knew they were lying, that it wasn't the first time that someone had promised forever and then cut him out when he got too annoying. It still sounded nice because just like Dream said, he was a pathetic little leech at heart.

Still, he couldn't stop himself from melting a bit under the warmth. Indulging the side of him that had grown to crave it after long days trapped in the nest or draped in gold. Maybe years ago, he could have fought it, but the urge to relax was practically engraved in his bones.

It's not like this was real anyways. Maybe it was just one last happy memory before his brain threw in the towel. He could let himself be a little greedy.

And so he lets himself drift back into the darkness, surrounded by warmth and someone singing forever in a language he can barely understand.

and he misses how the codes above him changes, forgets that they're not supposed to change without his permission. Forgets those long nights he spent watching admins change the world as they saw fit, the past process being reflected in the code above him.

This time will be forever. They promise that.

It feels like a zombie tried to chew out his eyes. Tommy groans, throwing his arm across his face to block out the light. This was a fucking bad way to wake up. He must have stumbled into the ocean again, the saltwater was a bitch on the eyes.

There was a soft humming sound. "Too bright?" Tommy grunted, still half asleep and groggy. His head was pounding. "I'll get that for you."

Tommy let out a relieved sigh as the searing burning nightmare light outside faded, letting him return to cool blackness. Ugh. Thank the gods for that.

Wait. Who was in his base?

He forced his eyelids to open, wincing a bit at the pain. His eyes felt sore and tired, drooping even after all his effort to open them. Across from him was a stranger, dressed in black and gold armor. Their face was hidden by a mask, tinted glass covering where their eyes would be. When they tilted their head up to look at him, he could see his own terrified gaze reflected back.

Tommy put his hands down to push himself up and then recoiled because *this wasn't his bed*. This was a cloud bed, a sublime bed, the bed all beds wished they were. The mattress was as soft as a cloud and the blankets were luxurious silky smooth and soft colored wool. The kind of nice that came from careful hand knitting and crafting, not thrown together with the magic of a craft table.

Not his bed.

His bed was hastily crafted, clumps of wool sticking out of the side, the blanket worn and slightly scratchy from sand that had embedded itself in it despite all his attempts to wash it.

He scrambled back, pressing his back against the wall and watching the stranger warily. "Did you fucking kidnap me?" He said, his voice jumping up an octave. Last he remember he was-

He was-

Tommy choked a bit, his hands fluttering as he fought to contain his panic. His chest felt like it had iron bars pressing down on it, the ocean rushing in to fill his lungs until there was no space left for air, no space left to breath and he was drowning, drowning on dry land-

Cold hands pulled him into a solid chest, one coming up to rub the back of his neck. "Match my breathing." Someone above him commanded. Their breathing was exaggerated, oddly wooshy and their voice tinged with a mechanical edge.

Tommy shuddered, tears beginning to well in his eyes because he couldn't do it. He couldn't breath. His chest jerked uselessly, no air being pulled in because he couldn't- he couldn't do it, couldn't fight the wave that was dragging him under.

The person's chest rose and fell underneath him, making him rock slightly. Their arms stayed locked around him no matter how much he flailed and swatted, his limbs weak and useless with lack of oxygen.

Distantly he knew that someone was whispering to him. "-doing so good just gotta breath a bit more steady, in and out, yeah, you got it-"

Finally he drew air in, a great wheezing breath that nearly made him double over from the force of it. But Tommy relished it because that was air, sweet sweet oxygen after his lungs had decided to up and quit on him.

He fought through the next few breaths, the dark spots in his vision slowly fading away. All throughout, the cold arms around him didn't move and the person never stopped talking.

It was nice. Almost. Because with oxygen came the reminder that he was kidnapped. Tommy tried to squirm away but the cold arms tightened their grip, unmoving. He beat on them uselessly, kicking and twisting but they showed no indication of feeling it. The armor blocked most of his hits and soon his struggles slowed to a stop with him panting and hanging uselessly in their arms, tired to the bone.

"Are you done?" They said. Tommy glared at them, wishing he could see their face through the stupid mask. "That was a nasty panic attack."

"Fuck you." Tommy spat. "I don't talk to kidnappers."

"I didn't kidnap you." They said. Tommy let out a ragged chuckle. Like he would believe that. He woke up in some random place and they thought they could convince him that he what? Sleepwalked here? As if Dream would let him stray so far from the beach. ~~As if his last memory wasn't of falling.~~ "There was a glitch of some kind and you entered my server."

"Yeah? And what server is that?" Tommy snapped. There was no way that Dream would let him leave the server. The option had been disabled on all of their comms, something they had agreed to back when the Dream SMP was going to be a peaceful forever home, a community. This dude was a stranger, yeah, but he probably was one of the newest dumbasses who joined. Someone who thought it would be funny to play a trick on the exiled guy.

“Hermitcraft.” Tommy squinted for a moment, ready to laugh and tell them to fuck off before the words froze on his tongue.

Oh-

Oh shit. Black and yellow armor. Antenna. A comm left lying on the nightstand next to the bed, screen still scrolling with code. The puzzle pieces fell into place.

oH SHIT-

Tommy froze, stock still. “I’m so sorry.” He said, eyes wide and heart hammering against his ribs. “I’m so sorry, I’ll just go, show me the fucking door. I didn’t mean to get here sir, really I didn’t.”

Hermitcraft wasn’t some random server, it was the server. The server that was whispered about in the hub, the one people gossiped and swapped stories about. A bunch of the most famous and high powered players across the multiverse called it home. And it was exclusive as all hell, the borders of the server so tightly locked down that no one could get inside. Even Philza, the only man ever, had never been lucky enough to see the world inside.

He had heard stories though. Towering castles, sprawling mansions, machines that laughed in the face of redstone laws. The ability to fly, withers being used as common farm animals, stuff that sounded like pure fairy tales. But no one was allowed on the server to see.

People had tried, he knew. It was a common enough game on 2b2t to joke about. Hack into the Hermitcraft server and see it. Prime, he had joked about trying it once or twice. Hundreds had tried, but the server borders were more solid than bedrock. And the rumors of what happened to those who succeeded- He swallowed heavily, fighting to keep his breathing even.

The Hermits didn’t like their peace getting disturbed.

And here he was, on their server. Next to what had to be their admin if the stories he heard were true. And he hadn’t just broken in, he had hit them, and ignored them, and screamed, all the stuff that always made Dream mad. Tommy Innit, professional destroyer of peace. They’d make the punishment ~~Tubbo~~ Dream had given him look like a vacation. He was dead. So so dead.

He chuckled awkwardly, eyes darting around, desperately trying to find a way out of this mess. “Just, uh, tiny mistake, so sorry. I’ll just be on my fucking way now.”

The arms tightened, holding him still, crushing him. “That’s not necessary.” They said and Tommy made a choked little sound, full of panic and fear. He didn’t want to die. He had to beat Dream, had to find many wives, had to tell Tubbo he was sorry, get his family back-

“Please.” He whispered, the words choked. He felt the hand rubbing the back of his neck again, false comfort for the dying, and prayed it would be quick.

“Oh, honey. I’m not going to hurt you.”

Chapter End Notes

Xisuma no, no that's not how you help with panic attacks

Friendly reminder that it's okay to have boundaries! If you don't want people to touch you, that's okay! And it's important to respect the boundaries of others! This is a fic, not real life. Disrespect somebody's boundaries and I'll steal your kneecaps.

Also, yeah, Ren and Scar are very smug that Tommy usually woke up when they were around even if the mistaken identity thing was awkward. He'd learn who they are soon enough.

I love comments so much. Even if I don't reply, know that I appreciate comments and reading them makes me happy. I'm hoping to post a new chapter on Monday of each week.

Meeting the Admin

Chapter Notes

Mild gaslighting in this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy let out a ragged chuckle. The sound grated on his sore throat, reminding him that he was still sick. Weak. With one move, the admin could snap his neck without so much as a twitch. “I don’t believe you.” He said, the words raspy. It felt like a cat had been using his throat as a scratching post.

Admins weren’t kind. They never were. They pretended to be kind, yes. Talked about doing things for the ‘good of the server’ and telling their players that oh no, they didn’t have to worry about rules too much, the rules were easy to follow. Nevermind that the rules weren’t fair. And then they got cruel, and the rules got stricter, and slowly, that kindness went away.

2b2t didn’t even pretend that the admins cared.

And this admin wouldn’t even do that for him because he had trespassed, not been invited. Had committed a crime that meant banishment at best from most closed servers and horrible death at worst. No one would care what happened to him.

“I know this is scary, honey.” The admin continued, their voice soft. Tommy wheezed a bit. “Do you want some water? That sounded like that had to have hurt a bit. I have some right here.”

“What do you want?” Tommy said, eyeing the dark mask. There was no way that water would come with no strings attached. He wasn’t going to beg for water, even if his throat felt like he had swallowed a handful of gravel and followed it with a handful of salt to taste.

“Nothing.” The admin said. They shifted their grip, leaning over to snatch a cup of water from the nightstand next to the bed. Tommy followed the gaze warily, but they didn’t move to pour it out or to pour it over his head. Tommy snorted skeptically, but he focused on the glass, subconsciously licking his lips. The thought of cold, sweet, water sounded really good and he couldn’t help swallowing a little, watching a bead of water streak through the condensation on the outside of the glass.

“That’s a lie.” He said. Nobody wanted nothing. Everything came with strings attached, especially when the other held all the power in the trade.

He reached for his inventory, sending the mental command that should have opened the translucent screen. Nothing. He thought it again, extra hard this time. Nothing, not even a flicker in the air in front of him.

It felt like there was nothing there when he reached. Everything was gone, and yeah, maybe all of the stuff in there had been shitty. Nothing he could have used to fight his way out. Dream's teaching methods had destroyed his supplies and left him with the most basic tools.

But it had been his. And now he really did have nothing.

"Fine then." The admin said. Tommy froze a little, dismissing his attempt. Even though he knew it was coming, it still made him nervous. He didn't want to beg. He had come too far, had fought against admins and players alike. No big man begged. "Tell me your name and you can have the glass of water."

"My name?" Tommy said, glancing back at the cup. He'd grab it but one arm had remained curled around his shoulders, a warning. If he tried to snatch it now, the admin could kill him. "Can't you just look at my player tag?"

"I could." The admin acknowledged. "But you came here because of a glitch, remember? There's no player tag for you because the server doesn't know who you are. I can only access some information."

"Oh, Tommy said. He must have forgotten about that. It had been a long time since he had curled into Wilbur's side while the other showed him the admin codes. Even longer since he had manipulated the codes of the world himself, back in 2b2t. "My name? That's all you want?"

"Absolutely, honey." The admin said Tommy eyed him.

"Why do you keep calling me that?" He said. The admin kept saying the word and at first he had thought it was a weird vocal tic thing. Some players picked them after a while and Dream had his weird laugh so maybe admins had more of them. But it didn't sound like a tic.

"Honey?"

"It's a nickname." The admin explained, and Tommy nearly flinched as the arm around his shoulders tightened. He was practically half in their lap already, the blankets tangled around his legs. "I don't know your name and honey seemed fitting for you."

Tommy flushed. "It does not." He snapped. "That's a baby nickname. Big men like him get called cool nicknames like 'king' or 'wife haver'."

The admin snorted, the sound strangely mechanical with the mask on. "I think I like honey better." They said. Tommy rolled his eyes.

"You sound like Wilbur." He mumbled, not noticing how the mask tilted and caught the light. For a brief moment, it looked like it was glaring. Tommy was too caught up in memories of the elder stubbornly calling him 'sunshine' usually accompanied with a soft sigh. Gremlin other times, usually when they were amused. Tommy had fought against it each time but the other had laughed and dismissed his complaints. "It's Tommy, okay? Tommy Innit."

"Tommy, hm?" The admin echoed. Tommy made grabby hands for the water, impatient. He had answered the fucking question and he'd like his water now. The glass was moved closer

until it was nearly pressed against his face. “My apologies, here you go.”

“I can hold it!” Tommy snapped, a flush stealing across his face. He wasn’t some baby who needed help holding water. He fumbled for the glass but the admin moved it out of his reach. “Stop being a bitch!”

“Language.” Tommy froze at the dark warning in their words. For a moment there, he had forgotten he was talking to an admin. “I will not have others swearing on my server.”

Tommy grumbled, flinching as the arm around his shoulder tightened, this time pulling him into the admin’s lap. His chin was forced up, making him look into their eyes, “Now, what do you say?”

“Fuck you.” Tommy spat. He flinched as the armor seemed to grow colder and he yelped, tugging useless at the arm around his shoulder. His heart beat against his ribs and for a moment, the mask in front of him faded and was replaced by another. “Fine, fine! I’m sorry!”

The words felt like rotten flesh on his tongue and it took everything he had not to rip the words back. He slumped a bit, sulking. Now he wouldn’t get the water either because he made trouble for the admin. What a rip off.

He flinched back as something cold was pressed to his lips. “Thank you.” The admin said. The glass moved away when Tommy looked up. The admin continued, their voice soft. “Now, I know you don’t like this but it’s the doctors’ orders not to let you move around too much. The potions we had to give you to deal with your injuries and your sickness took a lot out of you. You need to conserve your energy and I’d rather you not soak yourself because I forced you to take on too much, too fast.”

Potions? They had used potions on him? Why even bother? Potions weren’t too hard to make but they were usually conserved for more dire cases. Wilbur had been careful to only use their potions for injuries bordering on disabling with anything less getting whatever basic first aid treatment they could cobble together.

Nobody used potions to treat minor scrapes and sickness for free. Especially not for someone who had broken into a server. Maybe they wanted him out faster?

But it sounded true enough if they had used potions and he didn’t want to deny it just yet. The admin was already being kind enough to let him have the water. Dream would have left him to stew in his guilt. Reluctantly, Tommy opened his mouth, his cheeks red as an apple.

The few sips tasted like bliss and Tommy let out a relieved sigh, gulping it down. The icy water soothed his throat, washing away the dryness. He swallowed, going back for more immediately.

Tommy whined as the glass was pulled away. “Not too fast or you’ll make yourself sick.” The admin said. “Your stomach is delicate right now, you swallowed a lot of seawater and Stress said it looked like you haven’t been eating for a while either.”

"I feel fine." Tommy insisted stubbornly. Yeah his stomach felt a bit like he was going to hurl but he had no clue when he'd get water next. It hadn't escaped him that the admin hadn't mentioned what his punishment would be yet. At least he'd died without a sore throat.

"Just wait." The admin said. It felt like forever before the glass was moved back to his lips and he could continue gulping down the sweet water. All too soon, the glass was empty and Tommy let out a sigh as the admin returned it to the night table, the hand going back to cupping the back of his neck. "My name is Xisuma. As you might have guessed, I'm the admin."

Tommy shuddered. Here it comes. What would it be? Execution? Torture? Forced labor? He heard that their builds hit the build limit even if he didn't believe it himself. Surely those kinds of builds needed a lot of blocks. Having a pair of hands you didn't have to care about would be helpful.

He should be hoping for that. Slavery meant he would be alive, after all, and he had escaped from those cases before. 2b2t had been lawless after all and no one cared what happened to scrawny children. He was a big man though and big men didn't get captured by anyone.

But slavery really sucked. Like, really sucked. And as much as he wanted to punch Dream in the face, he hated forced labor.

The cold arms around him shifted and Tommy flinched, bracing himself for pain. Instead, Xisuma carefully shifted him so he was lying back down in bed. Tommy was so shocked that he let it happen, too frozen to fight back. "I oversee this server but I admit, your entry was a surprise to me."

"I didn't do it on purpose." Tommy whispered. He didn't have any of his old hack clients anymore. Phil had taken them away from him saying that they were dangerous and refused to return them no matter how much of a fit he had thrown. If he did, he would have swatted Dream like a bug that first time that admin acted like a bitch. Not broken into the Hermitcraft server.

He missed his hack clients. Life was easier when he could type a few commands and have the world at his fingertips. Wilbur and Philza both had admin powers, why couldn't he?

If he had his hack clients, exile would have never happened, he thought sullenly. Goes to show he never should have listened to Phil.

"I don't think you did." Xisuma said, smoothing down the blankets. Tommy blinks at him owlishly. Was this a trap? Were they distracting him from a knife or something? But when he looked around, everything was normal. Xisuma looked up and Tommy froze as that dark mask met his eyes. "I have a very tight hold over this server and it's whitelisted. If someone tried to hack in, I would notice immediately as they would be added to the whitelist. There's no hack that can completely hide a player from the whitelist when they join. But you were not added."

"Not added?" Tommy said, frowning. Even he knew that shouldn't be possible. It was possible to hide from a public whitelist, yeah, he'd done it before. But the private admin list?

You couldn't hide. Nobody could.

But then, what did it mean that he wasn't there?

"There are a few different reasons." Xisuma admitted. They rubbed a hand over their mask. "Considering the nature of how you joined and the entry in the chat. I suppose it would be wrong to say you aren't on the white list because you are. Just not... right."

"What?" Tommy said. He scrambled back as Xisuma turned away, certain the other was finally pulling a sword. But Xisuma just picked up his comm that was lying on the nightstand.

There was a bee painted on the back, he noted. Tubbo would love it. The thought made him grit his teeth, shoving away his regret and pain. Tubbo wasn't here right now. He'd just have to tell him about it later when he was back on the server.

There was an entry in chat when you joined." Xisuma said. "And I can see you in the server panel. But as you can see, it's not normal."

He tilted the screen to show him and Tommy jerked back, eyes wide.

Player フ・J・J||リリ| has joined the game.

It's an entry statement, something basically every server had. But the place where his player tag should be is distorted, the letters twisted and flickering. Static curls around the edges, a growing ache appearing behind his eyes as he watched them. He strains to make out the familiar lines, the curve of an o, the slashes of a T, but these letters are wrong. Warped.

He starts as a hand gently nudges his chin, breaking his line of sight. Tommy swatted it away with a growl, glaring at the other. "You'll hurt yourself if you keep staring at it." Xisuma said, tapping the screen.

"It's my name!" Tommy snapped. He could stare at it all he wanted! Even if it didn't look right, even if a headache still lingered.

"I know." Xisuma said. "That's undeniable. What's odd is how it's been twisted, translated into some dialect of the Galactic Alphabet that I am admittedly unfamiliar with. It's glitched."

Tommy chokes, scrambling to get to his feet. He screams, high and shrill as cold hands press him back down into the mattress, yanking and clawing at them. "Let me go!" He shrieked. "I'll kill you! I'll fucking kill you, I will!"

Prime, a glitch? That was even worse than a hacker. Most glitches got killed on sight before whatever twisted virus lurking in their code could spread.

He had seen it once, passing through a server before SMP Earth. There had been an old man staggering around a server hub, his eyes empty and foam dripping from his lips. He had never

forgotten the look in his eyes when they approached, the way they mouthed words but nothing passed through their lips.

Wilbur had pressed his face into their coat but it was too late to hide how the man's coding had begun to shred and there was no fabric in the world that could muffle the screams.

He didn't feel like a glitch. Nothing hurt, his words came out as normal. There was none of the creeping numbness talked about in spooky stories, the slow crawling pain as his insides tore themselves apart.

He felt like himself. The biggest man alive. But would Xisuma listen to him? When there was clear evidence on the screen? Nobody had listened to him before, this time wouldn't be any different.

"No you won't, honey." Xisuma said. Humiliatingly, Tommy could feel hot tears begin to force themselves out of his eyes, his traitorous body turning against him in his moment of need. "And I'm not going to kill you."

"You're lying." Tommy snarled. He didn't want to be patronized or treated like a dumb fucking child. "I'm a fucking glitch, of course you're going to kill me."

At least it wouldn't be Dream who killed him in the end. At least he had managed to get that one singular victory. He would die but it would be by another's hands.

"You're not a virus." Xisuma said like that meant anything. Tommy flinched as a cold thumb swiped across his face, wiping away the tears. "I'm not going to kill you because of some messed up coding. Coding can be fixed."

"You're fucking kidding me." Tommy said. Fuck, he wished this guy would give it a rest. They already held all the power here, their hands pressing on his chest and trapping him on the bed. "Nobody fixes glitches."

"It's not common, no. It takes a long time for an admin to sort out glitched coding." Xisuma said. They sighed. "Most admins choose not to bother and to erase the player instead. For more advanced cases, it can be seen as a mercy. But for beginning or more minor cases like this, an admin can fix it."

"Then you can just let me go then, right?" Tommy said hopefully. Dream wouldn't fix him but surely he could find an admin somewhere who was a bleeding heart. "Let me hop off this server and forget this ever happened, ey?"

"No."

Tommy felt the rise of his chest stutter, the walls beginning to press in. "But you said you weren't going to kill me." He whispered. He hated how small his voice sounded, how it sounded more like a childish whine.

"I did." Xisuma said. His dark mask gave nothing away, not a single twitch betraying his emotions. "As an admin, I have a duty to those of my server. You may not have joined in the

most conventional of ways but you are here now. That means you are mine to care for.”

Tommy held his breath as an armored palm stroked his cheek, the other one keeping his pinned with no sign of strain. “When you are hurt, you will come to me. When you are scared, I’ll soothe your fears. As hermits, we stick together.” Xisuma whispered. “And if you are glitched, I will fix you.”

He didn’t mean that. The words lingered on his tongue. But transfixed by that dark mask, Tommy couldn’t force them out. “Someone else would.”

There had to be at least one bleeding heart admin who was a sucker for a sob story. Hell, Xisuma probably knew one. They didn’t have to fix him themselves. Why take pity on him?

“It’d be far too dangerous for you to travel.” Xisuma corrected. Tommy let out a relieved sigh as the hand on his chest finally moved away. “Traveling while glitched will make the glitch worse. You’re relatively stable right now, but your coding will have been shredded. Even a small trip would render you unstable. You’re lucky to be as stable as you are.”

Tommy groaned, his head thumping against the mattress. Prime, he couldn’t believe his luck. “Nothing looks to be missing.” He said warily, eyeing Xisuma. He wriggled his hands. Yup, all ten fingers, present and accounted for. And he didn’t feel like a crazy person.

Dimly, he remembered dreaming of codes but whenever he tried to reach for the memory, it slid away. Was that part of being glitched?

“I’ve been helping you stay stable for now.” Xisuma said. The bed shifted slightly as he reached over, picking up the comm and tapping on it. “Now that I have your name, I can finally access your coding fully and see where the glitch is in your coding.”

“And once it’s fixed, I can go home, right?” Tommy said, hope seeping into his voice. If Xisuma wanted to help him, if his words were true, then they wouldn’t kill him for being an intruder. He could go home.

“Well.” Xisuma paused, looking at the screen. “It’ll take quite a while to fix your coding. But yes, once it’s fixed, you could leave.”

Tommy let out a relieved sigh, trying to sit up again and look at the comm. “How can I help? Is there something I can do to make it faster?”

He yelped as Xisuma pushed him back down. “Right now you need to rest.” The admin scolded, the comm disappearing to their inventory in a flash of light. And then they paused. Tommy stared up at them, a long moment ticking by under the admin’s dark gaze.

He held his breath. Had he annoyed them? Pushed too far? Were they going to change their mind and kill him after all?

“Actually, you can help me.” Xisuma said, holding out his hand. “Your comm, please.”

“What?” Tommy said, jerking away. “Fuck no!”

Even if he couldn't server hop, his comm was his lifeline. It lets him speak in chat, get server announcements, everything. Comms were important, too important to just hand over.

"Language." Xisuma scolded. Tommy flinched, certain the admin was going to strike him for his rudeness. Xisuma stared him down for a moment, before slumping a little. Their hand fell to rest on the blanket. "If I can see your comm, I can see if you have any error messages there. It could be a clue as to how you glitched out of your server."

"Oh." Tommy said. He felt oddly silly for yelling. Of course it was for a good reason. He didn't trust the guy but Xisuma hadn't hurt him. Had said they were going to help.

If it could get him home sooner...

"Fine." He said. Luckily, his comm still responded to him. It fell into his hand in a flash of light and Tommy pressed it into Xisuma's hand before he could second guess himself. "Give it back soon, yeah?"

"Of course." Xisuma said, mask tilting up to meet his eyes. "Thank you for trusting me. I'll check it over and add you as a player as well so you can access the chat and inventory system."

"Wait, really?" Tommy said, frowning. He rather thought the other would rather not. Easier to kick him out afterwards if he didn't have access to anything, hell, they wouldn't even have to mute him.

Dream had scolded him for his chat habits before, complaining about having to mute his constant comments and telling him that it made it harder to read what was actually important. The thought of it made something cold and embarrassed curl in his chest. Because yeah, maybe they were a bunch of stupid adults but the hermits were, admittedly, cool.

If even half of the rumors he heard were true, they were some of the best of the best. Even Phil, the biggest man ever, had admired their abilities. The thought of annoying them, of being muted by them after bugging them in chat too much made his face go warm, hot embarrassment blooming in his chest.

"You're part of the hermits now." Xisuma said as if that explained everything when really it explained nothing at all. "Of course you'll get access."

Tommy frowned. Well, at least he'd get his inventory back. He felt far too vulnerable without weapons or armor. He could totally take Xisuma without it but still. "So, you're just gonna leave me here?" He said, half hopeful. He could scout out the room if Xisuma left, look for escape routes just in case.

Just because Xisuma said he would help didn't mean he was telling the truth. He could be just like Dream, lying that he wanted to help and then teaching him a lesson.

Tommy pressed his hands to his temples with a hiss. Dream wasn't his friend. He wasn't being a bad person by reminding himself of that. Those lessons were sick torture for Dream's amusement, not lessons. He didn't need lessons.

“Of course not.” Xisuma rushed to say. Figures they couldn’t leave him alone for one fucking moment. Tommy scowled, looking away. “I’ll message Stress and Doc and ask them to come over and check on you. You won’t be alone.”

He grumbled, pulling the blankets up more. At least the bed was soft and warm. He yawned, the back of his mind pleading to return to sleep. To return to when this was just a dream and didn’t have to worry about this new server. Stubbornly, he forced his eyes to remain open. He wasn’t going to sleep in front of this bastard, he had been dumb enough already.

They’d changed his clothes, he noted with a sense of unease. At some point they had changed his clothes and he didn’t remember. His favorite t-shirt and pants, even if they were a bit raggedy, had been replaced by a soft button up pajama shirt that was two sizes too big and long sleep pants with the cuffs rolled up. No pockets so it’d be harder to hide anything he stole. Tommy scowled.

“Where did my clothes go?” He asked. He liked his clothes. And he wasn’t fucking happy someone had taken them away while he was sleeping.

“You’ll have to ask Stress or Doc that. They were the ones who helped you when you were first brought in.” Xisuma replied. Tommy folded his arms, not pleased with the answer.

He was lucky they hadn’t taken the time to hurt him while he slept. Tommy leaned back, keeping one eye on Xisuma. They didn’t move towards him again. Instead, they pulled their comm back out, typing on it as they glanced between their comm and his.

His hands itched to pull his comm away but he forced them to lie still. The sooner they figured this out, the sooner he could get home.

Did Tubbo know he had left the server yet? The entry message was glitched, did that mean his departure message was glitched as well? Or would it not show up at all, and the others didn’t know what had happened to him?

He didn’t like the thought of that. Of Tubbo not knowing that he had been forced to leave, that a glitch had forced him away. Tommy frowned, rubbing the edge of the blanket.

“Is everything alright?” Xisuma said suddenly. Tommy jolted a bit, hissing in pain at the sudden movement. When he looked up, the admin was staring at him again.

“Fine.” He said. He could feel their gaze on him even when he looked away. He didn’t see why the admin should care. After all, for all their talk of being one of their players now, he was only sticking around until his coding got fixed. After that, he’d blow this popsicle stand.

“You can talk to me, you know.” Xisuma coaxed. “Maybe I can help.”

“No.”

“Fine then. I know you’re new and this must be very frightening after all. I’ll let it pass this time.” Xisuma said, turning back to his comm. “Stress and Doc said they’d be here in a few moments.”

At that moment, the door was pushed open. “We’re here!” A woman said, stepping through. She had short dark brown hair, a flower crown upon her head. A pink doctor’s coat was draped around her shoulders. “Ah, he’s awake!”

“Hello, Stress.” Xisuma greeted. And if seeing Stress wasn’t enough, Tommy’s own stress levels ratcheted up a few at the next person to walk through the door.

He was tall, taller than him. Mottled green patches covered his skin, marking him as a creeper hybrid. One eye had been replaced with a bionic replacement, the red eye glowing in the dim light of the room. He looked like the kind of guy who should be chuckling evilly over a laser, not standing next to a woman in a flower crown.

And if that wasn’t bad enough, there was a third dude with them. He came in in a flurry of feathers, his colorful parrot-like wings flared. The sight of them made something deep inside Tommy melt, noting the similarity to the dark wings in his memories. He threw a mental chair at the thought. But instead of green robes and a weird hat, the guy wore a red sweater and had no hat at all.

Tommy glanced around, his hands white knuckled in the blanket. With the new guy, that made four people here. One or two, he could maybe handle but four? That was a bit much, even for someone as godly as himself.

“Doc.” Xisuma said, tucking the comm away. “And Grian. I thought you were getting some rest?”

Tommy froze as parrot wings- Grian laughed, walking closer. “I was! And then I saw the message on Doc’s comm that the kid has woken up.” He glanced up, his eyes meeting Tommy’s and Tommy instantly redirected his sight to the blanket.

Because that was *Grian*. The Grian. The one who had killed Dream in a tournament. Tommy wouldn’t call himself a fan, definitely not a simp, but he had maybe, perhaps, collected footage of the tournaments Grian had used to participate in before joining the Hermits. He was cool with a capital C and now he was standing in front of him.

“Can you lie back and relax a little.” Stress said, far too close. Tommy flinched, looking up. She smiled back at him but it was ruined slightly by Doc leaning over her shoulder. “I want to check your stomach.”

“It feels fine.” Tommy lied. Actually it didn’t feel fine. It felt like someone had taken a knife and stabbed him there but they didn’t need to know that. Doc sighed.

“It may feel fine but we still want to check it. You had some burns and shrapnel wound around there and burns complicate healing. It’s important that we check it over to ensure it’s on the right track.” Doc said. Tommy considered it, hands still clutching the blanket.

“I can check it myself.” He insisted. He had taken care of his burns before. He had quite the collection going on his arms between the war and the Dream’s ‘lessons’ in exile. He knew what to look for.

“Doc and Stress know what they’re doing,” Grian said. Tommy scooted away as they flopped down on the edge of the too big bed, grinning at him. He never thought the Dreamslayer would have such a goofy smile. “And if you don’t let them check on you, they’re going to worry themselves into a fit. Doctors, am I right?”

“Say you,” Stress said lightly. She glanced back at Tommy. “Just real quick and then we’ll get you some food afterwards.”

Fuck. Food did sound nice. His stomach growled, reminding him that he hadn’t eaten in awhile. And without access to his inventory, he didn’t have any access to food of his own. Could he afford to be weak around them?

“I want to know where my clothes are,” Tommy bargained. He wanted them back, preferably soon.

“Deal,” Stress said. Tommy forced himself to take a deep breath, lying back and staying still as she gently pushed the shirt up slightly. Clean white bandages were wrapped around his stomach, another sign of the luxury of this server. He usually used rags from clothes that had become too worn to wear, or raw spider string.

“I was planning on being here when you woke up,” Grian said. Tommy glanced back to him, feeling more than seeing Doc sit on the bed as well to check the bandages closer. “I was one of the two who brought you in, the one you fell asleep on.”

“You were?” Tommy said doubtfully. He didn’t remember that. Well, He didn’t remember it well. Dimly, he thought he could recall falling asleep on someone warm, soft chirps following him down. But he had thought that was a dream. Surely Grian hadn’t let some weird kid use him as a pillow.

“Oh yeah!” Grian said. He propped his chin up on his hand. “You were so tired from the server transfer and your injuries that you passed out on top of me. I wasn’t going to push you back into the water!”

Tommy frowned. He was that tired? Thinking back to the incident, his memory as to what happened was kind of fuzzy. But what Grian said did make sense. He had been pretty injured and falling in the ocean probably wouldn’t help. Just, for some nagging reason, he didn’t feel right with the explanation.

“Sorry about that,” He said, his cheeks feeling warm as he immediately glanced back to what Stress was doing. Prime, this was pretty fucking embarrassing. Instead of being his usual cool big man self, one of the people he idolized- *thought could be as cool as him* saw him as a wimpy kid who immediately passed out on top of them.

If Grian even thought about leaking this news, he was going to stab him, Dreamslayer or not.

Surprisingly, Grian shook his head. “It was really no problem! You needed sleep and comfort.”

If that was meant to be a kindness, it didn't feel like it. "I'm not a kid, big man." Tommy said. Stress was nearly finished unwrapping the bandage and after his wounds were dealt with, he had no doubt the others would leave. If they didn't, he'd make them. He wasn't going to be gawked at like an animal, not again.

He jumped as Grian's hand landed on his shoulder. "Careful." Stress scolded, glancing away from the bandages for a moment. Doc let out an answering hum. "I don't want to hurt you more because you moved too much."

Shouldn't she be scolding Grian and not him? This was pretty fucking unfair.

The hand holding his shoulders squeezed. "It's not childish to want comfort." Grian said, his smile far too sweet. Tommy scowled at him.

Yeah right. The other probably wanted him to make a fool of himself. He didn't want to do stupid stuff like cuddle or anything. He didn't need that.

When he opened his mouth to say this, Grian squeezed his shoulder again and Tommy faltered. Could he risk annoying them now? Dream said he'd drive away anyone who wanted to help if he was himself. He was on thin ice already, having crashed into their server.

He gritted his teeth, feeling the heat simmering in his chest as he glanced away. "So, where are my clothes?"

"We burned them."

Chapter End Notes

It's true that Tommy's glitched but whether what Xisuma says about it can be trusted, mmmm maybe not.

Also, because I've seen this going around lately, I'm just going to address it before it comes up, THIS IS PLATONIC, NOT ROMANTIC. I will turn this car around if y'all start calling this romantic. The Hermits are just very traumatized people who are very isolated and developed bad coping strategies and a penchant for darker behaviors because of it. But they would never see Tommy that way and neither will Tommy. THIS. IS. NOT. A. ROMANTIC. FIC.

On a better note, I love comments so much. Even if I don't reply, know that I appreciate comments and reading them makes me happy!

Ashes in the Past

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Abuse denial. Tommy's been conditioned to believe that if you fight back, it's not abuse WHICH IS NOT TRUE. Abuse isn't just hurting someone who can't fight back, it's a myriad of actions over a wide spectrum. Don't be afraid to seek help because of the reasoning Tommy's using.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When he heard the news, he sat in shock for a moment, certain that they were lying. They couldn't- they couldn't just burn his stuff! But nobody laughed or smiled. Xisuma kept typing away at his comm, Stress and Doc were focusing on his wounds, even Grian was smiling that stupid smile.

"You what!" Tommy snapped, pushing himself up and shoving Stress' hands away. He didn't want them anywhere near him, not when his clothes had been turned to ashes. "Those were mine! How fucking dare you!"

pits in the ground- put your things in the hole tommy- this is your lesson- He forced his thoughts away, panting as he balled up his fists. He jerked away from Stress as she reached for the half done bandages, his voice rising to a shriek "How fucking dare you, you wronguns, you fucking burned my clothes! Don't fucking touch me!"

He lunged forward, wanting to hit, bite, kick, force them to give him his clothes back- but warm arms wrapped around him, forcing his back to someone's chest. "It's okay Tommy." Grian whispered in his ears.

"Let go of me!" Tommy screamed, pounding at every inch of Grian he could reach. He bucked wildly but Grian's grip was like steel. Even worse, Stress and Doc moved away so he couldn't even give them a good kick, the absolute bastards.

They had almost tricked him. He had almost fallen for it, thought that they were nice people and behind his back, they had burned his fucking clothes. Those clothes were his. The only items he had been able to keep throughout the exile, the last mementos of a time before the war. And now they were gone like smoke just like everything else he had before then.

They were just like Dream.

He jerked his head down, sinking his teeth into Grian's arm and feeling viciously satisfied when he heard a sharp warble of pain. Fuck him. The sharp tang of blood burst into his mouth and it took everything he had not to gag at the taste.

“That’s enough.” Tommy screeched as a cold hand forced his jaw open, allowing Grian to pull away. In one smooth move, he was yanked into armored arms. He fought, kicking and screaming, but if Grian’s grip was like steel, Xisuma’s was like a brick wall. They didn’t seem to notice his struggles at all, sitting and holding him like he was a little kid throwing a temper tantrum.

Tommy started to wheeze, his struggles slowing. It felt like his stomach was burning the more he moved, the pain growing and growing. His arms felt like he was lifting them through sludge. “Are you ready to listen now?” Xisuma said. Tommy growled, trying to bite him. But there was nothing to bite, all he got was a mouthful of cold armor. “Fine.”

And the fucker started ignoring him, humming as they started scrolling through the comm still in their hand. He tried swatting at it but they just moved it away without a word. Across the room, Stress and Doc busied themselves with their kit, Grian hovering over their shoulder, shooting little glances at Tommy. Tommy scowled at him. “Fuck you.” He hissed. “Fucking- let me go!”

“Are you ready to listen?” Xisuma said. Tommy summoned up the last of his energy and headbutted him. His head met the armor with a dull thunk, making his head ache and spin. Xisuma sighed. “Then I’m not letting you go.”

Tommy gritted his teeth, trying his best to fight back. He wasn’t going to let this fucker treat him like this!

But the worst part was, he knew he wasn’t going to win. With every move, his stomach burned and his head spun. And he hadn’t made a single dent on Xisuma. In a matter of minutes, he was reduced to a limp ragdoll in Xisuma’s arms, gritting his teeth through the agony.

It felt achingly familiar. His fa- Philza had done this for him before, back when he was first adopted. He had fought them at every point, desperate to leave. But Philza had pinned him down in the nest, waiting for him to exhaust himself. He always lost then too.

“That was very foolish.” Doc grumbled. Tommy tilted his head up, glaring at him. He didn’t want to listen to the other fucker right now. The creeper hybrid sighed, sitting on the end of the bed. Just out of kicking distance unfortunately. “Look, spitfire, we didn’t want to burn your clothes.”

“Then why did you FUCKING DO IT?” Tommy spat. Those were his clothes, not theirs. They shouldn’t have even touched them. Shouldn’t have taken them away from him, leaving him with nothing but some oversized pajamas.

Fuck, he didn’t even have his compass with him. He wracked his brains, trying to remember if he had it up there on the pillar. Had it been destroyed or did he leave it behind?

“Because once we knew you were glitched, it meant that any items that came with you could be glitched as well.” Xisuma said. Selfishly, Tommy hated how reasonable the other sounded. He wanted them to be angry to be snappy, but they kept talking in that same calm voice. “The more glitches there are on the server, the more my attention is split to stabilize and neutralize

them. In light of this, I thought it would be better to destroy the items you had on you so I could focus on your glitched status. Not to mention, additional glitches could destabilize your coding further. I didn't want to risk them being what tipped you from an easily treatable glitch to something more fatal. I apologize.

"Fuck you." Tommy snapped but the venom in his words was weaker now. Doc sighed.

"Language. We would have asked you but you were already sick and battling some pretty nasty wounds. So we went ahead and made the decision to get rid of them. I know it you may not like it but it was what needed to be done." Doc said. Tommy gritted his teeth.

"Well, you're right I don't like it." Tommy said. He hated this. Hated how they turned it back on him, making him feel small, like the bad guy.

Because they were right, weren't they? If he was glitched, anything that came with him was glitched too. They destroyed the clothes to help him. He bit his lip, his fingers digging into the blanket still twisted in his lap. He wanted to be angry, but it didn't feel right and he hated it.

"That's fine." Xisuma said. Tommy flinched as the arms around him moved but instead he was gently pushed back onto the bed, out of Xisuma's grip. "It's okay for you to be annoyed. But in the future, you shouldn't curse so much."

Tommy rolled his eyes. He couldn't believe he had ended up on a fucking no swearing server. Weren't the people here supposed to be adults? Were they a bunch of Bads?

"That's right?" Grian said, grinning. "And if you want, I can help you remake the clothes!"

Stress snorted, bumping his shoulders with hers. "You mean Iskall and I will be helping him remake them. You couldn't sew your way out of a paper bag."

"Hey!" Grian said sulking. Stress shook her hand, walking back over to the bed. Tommy flinched, glancing at Xisuma but the other only shifted to let her sit down again. There was no sign of any punishment. "I'm not that bad!"

"Last time you tried to sew, you sewed your hand to the shirt and got stuck like that for three hours because you refused to call anyone to help you." Doc said. Tommy threw his head back and cackled, making the others jump slightly but they relaxed a moment later. If he had been looking, he might have caught how Xisuma's typing slowed, Stress and Doc exchanged a look, and Grian's smile softened.

"You can't even fucking sew, big man?" He said, shaking his head. How the hell did they sew their hand to the fabric? And that badly? "Prime, you're worse than- It's not like its hard!"

Grian let out a squawk of dismay. "I'm not that bad!" He said pleadingly. Tommy's cackles grew louder as Grian glanced around support and was met with nothing. Stress was hiding her mouth with her hand, Doc carefully not looking at anyone, and if Xisuma got any closer to the comm, he'd break his stupid mask. Grian's feathers ruffled, fluffing up. "It's hard! I'd like to see you try it!"

“No, you wouldn’t, because I could sew you under the table.” Tommy said smugly, shaking his head. Prime, his stomach hurt from laughing.

“You’re good at sewing?” Stress asked. Tommy flinched as her hands pressed into his stomach again before relaxing. Just a bit longer. He could do this.

“The best in my server. Everyone else sucked so bad.” Tommy bragged. “I sewed just about everything until-” He paused, not continuing. The words got stuck in his throat.

He stopped sewing in Pogtopia. The last thing he made was Wilbur’s stupid jacket. After that, no one really cared about his sewing skills, and he just patched up his own. He didn’t want to use the crafting table or trade with the villagers like everyone else did. He had tried to sew during Exile, wanting to maybe send out a few gifts, but everything he made was turned to ashes.

Eventually, he got tired of it and dropped it so he could focus on the real stuff that mattered. Sewing was just a hobby anyways.

It was fine. Absolutely fine. Sewing was a silly hobby anyways. He coughed, waving a hand. “Until I got bored.”

“Well, I can get you some new fabrics and thread. I always have a ton of surplus left over from my farms.” Stress said. “It would be no problem at all.”

“I’m good. Don’t need any of that.” Tommy said, waving a hand. He wasn’t going to get himself into debt further. They already had far too much over him and he didn’t believe Xisuma when the other said that there were no strings attached. There were always strings attached.

Stress hummed, carefully unwinding the last layer of bandages. Tommy hissed a little at the spark of pain and then again when he saw the wound.

It wasn’t terrible or unfamiliar. When his base blew up, he didn’t have armor, only his tattered shirt to defend him. A bit of the shrapnel had grazed his stomach, leaving three long gouges that had oozed blood. The rain of gunpowder had burned through his shirt in some areas, leaving patchy burns. He hazily remembered clumsily wrapping the wound in spider silk and going to mine dirt.

Honestly, it looks better now. The nearly black bruising around it had lightened to yellow green and the scratches had scabbed over. The burns had partially healed as well. Not quite fighting fit, but he was pretty sure he could put up a good one. He scowled. Unless it was Xisuma.

“This is-” He glanced at Stress. Her eyes were dark, her knuckles white from how tightly she was holding the bandages. “This is terrible!”

“Tommy, who did this to you?” Doc said, looming at his side. Tommy gritted his teeth. He hated transparent pity.

“Ey, it’s not that bad. Practically healed already.” Tommy said with a shrug and a glare. He wasn’t going to let them make fun of him. He was strong enough to take a little wound like this. And he especially wasn’t going to tell these people. They’d probably gotten way worse and this was barely a scratch compared to that. He’d look like a baby. “I’ve had worse.”

“Tommy, this is terrible.” Grian said. They tucked themselves under Doc’s arm and Tommy had to look away from the other’s sad eyes. “If this was done to you on purpose then you should let us know.”

“Why? It doesn’t fucking matter.” Tommy said, folding his arms. Once he came back, he was going to show Dream that the fucker could never touch him again. That he rose above these stupid things.

Because they weren’t lessons. They weren’t. Hurting him wasn’t- it was Dream torturing him. The other wasn’t right about him. They weren’t.

And fuck, he wasn’t going to tell them that and risk them saying that they were lessons he should have learned.

“It does matter.” Xisuma said, putting down the comm. Tommy kept his gaze down, refusing to meet their eyes. “You’re one of my players now. That means anything that threatens your safety, I need to know about.

Tommy snorted. “He couldn’t threaten my safety if he tried.” He said. Dream was a coward, a bitch, and a wrongun. With his gaze down, he didn’t see how the Hermits’ eyes darkened, nor the looks they exchanged.

“Tommy, whoever this was, they hurt you. They could have killed you if the wound went deeper and then they left you without medical help.” Stress said. Tommy shrugged. That’s was how it went. Couldn’t offer medical help to people you weren’t allies with after all. Too risky. “It could have killed you slowly and painfully if you didn’t receive medical assistance.”

“You guys are making too big of a deal of it. I’m sure you’ve seen worse.” Tommy said flippantly.

“We have and that’s why we’re worried.” Grian said. “If someone is hurting you, that’s serious and you deserve help.”

“I said it’s fine. So just wrap it up or whatever. You’ve ogled it enough.” Tommy snapped. He was fine. He didn’t need help or to whine about his entire fucking backstory. Dream was a bitch. The end. He’d fucking handle it himself once he got back to the Dream SMP.

“Fine then.” Doc said, pushing past Grian. A glass bottle fell to the bed with a soft thump as the creeper hybrid crouched. As Tommy watched, they carefully began folding a piece of cloth before uncorking the bottle and wetting the cloth.

He recognized that glimmer. A regen potion?

“But Doc!” Grian protested. Tommy glanced up, his eyes trailing over Grian’s fluffed up wings. Something had bird boy unhappy.

“If you keep pushing now, you’ll delay his medical treatment. You can ask again once it’s finished, but right now, he had wounds that need to be tended. I don’t want to risk infection.” Doc said. The creeper hybrid had officially gone up a few notches in his book. Not that he couldn’t handle the questioning but he didn’t really want to.

Tommy eyed the cloth that now shimmered with the glittery liquid of a potion. “What’s that for?” He asked warily.

“We’re applying it to your stomach. It’s not quite as good as taking the potion internally but applying it this way allows for surface level healing and reduces scarring.” Doc said. Tommy frowned. It’s not that he didn’t know that, he had learned quite a lot about the ins and outs of drug taking during the van days. What he wasn’t sure about was why they were using it.

“But why?” He asked. The potions color was clear, not dull, and it shone with the vibrancy of a freshly made potion. It had to be potent, the kind of stuff usually kept for emergencies. He didn’t understand why they would decide to waste that sort of stuff on him instead of saving it for someone who needed it.

“Why what?” Doc said, glancing up. “The wound will heal better after this is applied.”

“Maybe he comes from a world without potions? I know quite a few that don’t have any.” Grian said. Those sounded like terrible worlds in his expert opinion. What did people do when they were seriously hurt?

“No, I know what a potion is but why use it on me? It not that bad, I’m not dying, I don’t need it. Why not save it for someone that does?” Tommy said, glancing between the hermits with a frown.

Xisuma got up without speaking, disappearing through the door. Tommy flinched at the sound of it closing, his breath hitching in his chest. “Did I say something wrong?” He asked. But it was the truth, innit? He didn’t need the potion.

“No, you’re not in trouble, dear.” Stress said. Her face had crumpled, eyes oddly shiny. “Tommy, you’re in pain and injured. The potion is to help with that, make sure that you’re healing safely. Of course we would give it to you. Why would we not?”

“Stress has a whole potion factory.” Grian chimed in. Tommy frowned. How the hell did someone do that? Even their little van wasn’t really a factory. Grian had to be stretching that because there was no fucking way anyone could do it. The blaze rods alone would take weeks to gather and the factory would be the first target during a war. “And stacks of regen potions. A few for you isn’t even a dent in it all. You can take as much as you need.”

“I don’t have money.” Tommy snapped. He folded his arms over the wound to hide it, hissing a bit as his skin brushed against still healing skin. “I’m not going to let you hold this over my head.”

“No strings attached.” Stress promised. She sighed at the stubborn look on his face. “Either you move your arms and let Doc apply it, or I’ll be applying it while Doc holds your arms down. Your choice.”

His breath hitched as he stared at the hermits. Would they do it? Part of him said no, that surely they’d walk away like most people did. The other part reminded him of how easily Xisuma had held him in place, how Grian had pulled him away during his not panic attack. Doc sighed, beginning to move his hand towards Stress, the cloth outstretched. Fuck. That answered that. “Fuck, fine! Here.” He snapped, moving his arms away. He’d rather agree on his own then let the choice be taken away again. “If you want to waste it, go ahead.”

“It’s not wasting it.” Stress reminded him gently. Tommy rolled his eyes before jumping as the cloth pressed against his stomach. There was the familiar tingle of a potion, mixed with the pain of still healing wounds. He hissed, letting his head fall back against the pillow as he bit his lip, trying to breath through the pain.

“So, what’s your server like?” Grian said suddenly. Tommy glanced up at him. “We don’t leave our server often and we visit private servers far less often.”

Well, yeah, that’s why they were called hermits, innit? “It’s a server.” Tommy said. He grunted in pain as the cloth swiped over a particularly raw burn. After this application, he should be back on his feet. “Dunno what to tell you, big man. It’s small, it’s got cobblestone and some players fucking around, that’s about it.”

“Is your admin going to be looking for you? If it’s so small?” Tommy froze at the words.

Would Dream be looking for him? Part of him said no. He had caused the admin so much trouble. They were so tired every time they visited, the weight of looking after the server weighing them down. His antics had been the worst of all according to their words. Leaving probably made their job a lot easier.

The other part of him screamed yes. That friend or twisted bastard or whatever, Dream and his little dance wasn’t over. That any moment now, Xisuma would walk in with Dream, shaking his head in disappointment after realizing how much of a fuck up Tommy was and Dream would shake his head to and say it’s time for your lessons again, “Tommy-”

“Tommy!”

Tommy gasped for air, pulling himself out of his thoughts. His head stung and dimly, he realized his hands had been pulling at his hair, hard enough to make his scalp ache. Grian was leaning over him, his colorful wings flared.

“Are you okay?” He said. “It looks like you’re having a panic attack.”

A warm hand landed on his shoulder and Tommy tried to shrug it off. “I’m fucking fine. Just thinking about big man stuff.”

Grian was unmoved, his warm hand staying firmly on Tommy’s shoulder. “You want to tell me about that stuff? Because I don’t think it’s normal to start having a panic attack when

someone asks you questions about your server, mate.”

“I said I’m fine! Don’t be so nosy.” Tommy snapped. Something in his mind whispered that he was being cruel again. Grian was just worried for him and shouldn’t he appreciate it? After all, it was rare that someone cared enough to ask about how he was doing. And look at him, throwing Grian’s kindness back in his face like a brat.

Tommy shoved that mental voice into a mental garbage can. It was none of Grian’s business what his server was like or what his admin was like.

Grian searched his eyes, his mouth set in a determined line. “This is a safe space, mate. If your admin is abusing you, you can tell us and we’ll bring it before the council.” He said. Tommy scoffed.

Abuse? What Dream was doing wasn’t abuse. The admin was a wrongun, yes, but Tommy had fought back. For every scar on his body, he had put up a fight. He was still fighting. It wasn’t abuse because he couldn’t be abused, only people who couldn’t fight got abused. And he most definitely didn’t need a council. He could handle Dream by himself.

“You guys done with that yet?” He set, breaking his gaze away and looking at his stomach. It looked far better now, the lighter burns already pink scar tissue. Ladies love scars. Doc glanced up from his work carefully wiping over a small burn. “It’s taking you forever. Pass it over, I’ll get it done faster.”

“Potions need to be applied carefully.” Doc said, moving the cloth away. “I don’t want to miss a spot or not apply enough, spitfire.”

Again with the nicknames? Tommy rolled his eyes. “It’s already healed better than most wounds I’ve had, quit while you’re ahead, buddy.” He said, glancing at the wound again. It didn’t hurt much anymore, the sharp pain of a knife digging into his ribs being downgraded to a slow throb. Comfy.

Doc paused for a moment. “It needs to heal well and the extra time is important.” He said slowly before carefully returning to his careful work. Tommy squirmed a bit under the touch. It felt like his skin was burning, itching all over.

Being held was weird but it was like being restrained. A fight. But Doc’s careful work and Grian’s hand on his shoulder felt odd in a way he couldn’t describe. Like bugs running under his skin, begging for him to pull them closer and push them away at the same time.

He forced himself to ignore it, trying again to shrug off Grian’s hand. But it stayed firmly in place on his shoulder, unmoving. Grian wasn’t even looking at him when he glanced up.

It took everything he had not to pull Doc’s hand back after they finally pulled away, his cheeks flushing hot in embarrassment. He wasn’t a child! He wasn’t going to ask them to touch him, to hug him like some whiny baby. He didn’t need touch.

Stress hummed, answering some unasked question before moving forward to take Doc’s place. She was holding clean white bandages. “After wrapping these up, you’ll need to stay

in bed for a while. Likely a few days.” She said.

“You’re joking.” Tommy said, bolting upright and staring at her. But there was a determined set to her face like she very much wasn’t. “Are you kidding me? It’s practically healed already! I’m not going to lounge around in bed.”

He paused, staring at her. Or was this code for keeping him in one spot so they could keep him out of trouble? If so, he was still pretty pissed. If they didn’t want him fucking around on their server, they should have the courage to say it to his face, not dance around it.

“The scratches are not fully healed yet and much of it is new scar tissue. Too much activity and the skin could tear open again. After a few more applications of regen potion, you’ll be good to go but you’ll need to keep it to light exercise.” Stress insisted. “Too much, too fast, and you could seriously hurt yourself.”

“You’re exaggerating it.” Tommy insisted. He ignored the warning squeeze coming from his shoulder. He had run around with partially healed wounds before, and yeah, it sucked sometimes. A few scabs had been torn open and he had lost a few shirts to blood. But that was how it went. “If you don’t want me on the wider server, just say so. Don’t pussyfoot around.”

“Tommy.” Doc said, his voice sharp and suddenly Tommy was reminded of how much the fucker loomed over him. “We do want you around on the server. But you need to take care of yourself. And if you won’t do that, we’ll have to make you.”

Tommy stiffened up. What was that supposed to mean? Before he could ask, Grian interrupted. “It’ll be fun, don’t worry!” He said. “We’ll keep you company during it. I have so many funny videos and prank stories if you’re into it! And after that, you’ll be able to check out the server! It’ll be great!”

“As if I’d want you interrupting me constantly.” Tommy mumbled. He kind of doubted they would. For all Grian’s enthusiasm, he had no reason to trust the other’s words. He flinched at the feeling of cool bandages on his stomach.

“Easy. This part will go quick.” Stress said, eyes on her work. Tommy nodded firmly. The pain wasn’t too bad. Not very comfortable, but manageable. He forced himself to take a deep breath and lean back again, watching as she carefully began to apply tape to the outside of the bandage patch, not wrapping it around like before. “You’ll need to be careful not to spill anything on this. We can swap the bandages out but I’m still worried about infections especially after you were just sick.”

“I wasn’t sick, I never get sick.” Tommy said. “Can’t believe one of the famous hermits is spreading fake news. Wow, such a lie I have never seen before.”

“I literally saw you while you were sick. Who do you think gave you your medicine?” Stress said, rolling her eyes. “I don’t think it’s a lie to say so.”

“I’m with him, I didn’t see Tommy while he was sick.” Grian said. He winked at Tommy. “I can’t believe you would lie about something like this. Everyone knows that Tommy never

ever gets sick. It's simply impossible."

"My immune system is too strong for viruses. Nothing gets through my defenses." Tommy boasted.

"Maybe so, but you'll still had to take your medicine." Stress said, standing up. Tommy faked gagging at the thought. He hated drinking medicine when he was sick. He didn't really remember it well, they didn't have cold medicine on the Dream SMP, but he remember the disgusting taste from before then.

"Can't believe you tortured me like that. Can't trust anyone here." He joked. The next medicine cup he saw was getting thrown in the ocean.

"You can always trust me or any of the other hermits." Stress said, her voice oddly serious. When he glanced back up, she was staring at him. Weirdchamp. He shook his head, glancing back down.

"Just a joke." He said. Finally he felt her eyes move off of him.

"Doc and I need to step out for a bit while we go over our notes. Grian, can you watch over him?" She asked. Grian saluted.

"I got him! We're going to have so much fun together!" He cheered.

Tommy spluttered. "Wait, fuck you, I don't need a babysitter!" Stress laughed, slipping out behind Doc. The door shut with a heavy thud. He turned his head, glaring at a cheery Grian.

"It's not so bad." Grian said. "Now we can talk! I'm sure you have tons of questions by now! Shashwammy isn't always the best at talking so I can step in!"

"I'm fine. This place is weird, but I'm fine." Tommy said, carefully buttoning up the pajama shirt again. He'd have to steal this when he went back to the Dream SMP, it was so fucking cozy. If they wanted it back, they shouldn't have given it to him. Finders keepers, loser weepers.

"How is it weird?" Grian said, tilting his head to the side. He sat on the edge of the bed, making Tommy grumble and scoot closer to the other side. What was with people and invading his bubble?

"You're all weird." He said, annoyed. "You keep saying odd stuff like 'oh Tommy you're one of the players now' and 'oh Tommy you can't get up yet'. It's like you think I'm some kind of baby. And I'm not. I'm a big man and I've dealt with a lot worse."

"But you shouldn't have." Grian said. He paused for a moment, gathering his thoughts. "We want you to be safe, you know? When you crashed in, you were so scared and so hurt. And it hit a nerve. A lot of us, actually, all of us came from bad backgrounds so when we see someone hurt, we want to help."

"I don't need help." Tommy insisted. Maybe he had needed help before but that time had long passed. He needed help back during the war for independence, back in Pogtopia when

Wilbur was spiraling. Not now when he was standing on his own two feet. Any help now was unnecessary.

“It’s easy to think that. I used to think I wouldn’t need help either, that I could keep going by myself. It took a long time to realize that I needed to get help.” Grian said. He scrubbed a bit at his eyes. “Aw, mate, you got me tearing up again. Look, I know you’re probably antsy but it won’t be too bad. You’ll get used to it, I promise.”

“I won’t be sticking around that long. It’s not like I’m joining permanently, I’m just here till your admin gets me unglitched or whatever.” Tommy said. After that, he’d be on his way to the hub to take the portal to Dream SMP.

Grian hummed, glancing away for a moment. “So, what is your server like?” He asked, changing the subject. “You didn’t answer me earlier.”

“And you didn’t take that as a fucking hint?”

“You really got to stop swearing, mate. It’s not allowed on the server.” Grian said, narrowing his eyes. “Shashwammy would be very annoyed to find that you’re still doing it even after he let it slide with a warning earlier.”

Tommy scowled at him, valiantly restraining the wave of vitriol that rose to the tip of his tongue. He wanted, so badly, to curse the other out. It was only the memory that he was at their mercy that stopped him.

If he really was glitched, he had no doubt Dream would erase him. And yeah, he could go find another admin, but why make it harder? He’d just stick around till Xisuma fixed him and then blow this popsicle stand.

“I’m not talking about it.” He said. “So you can either pick a different subject or leave.”

Grian sighed. “I suppose that’ll be a topic for another conversation. Now, move over. I have funny videos.”

Chapter End Notes

This is definitely not how you handle trauma. Are they telling the truth about the clothes? Maybe. Maybe not. But the Hermits definitely lied a few times in this chapter. Doc and Grian have a pretty good good cop, bad cop system.

On a better note, I love comments so much. Even if I don’t reply, know that I appreciate comments and reading them makes me happy!

Truth (and lies)

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Mild suicidal thoughts due to Tommy thinking about the pillar and ocean incident. Minor nonconsensual touch and discussion of it.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy wheezed with laughter, feeling his shoulders shaking with the force of it. “How did you even get the jukebox to play that?” He said, wiping the tears out of his eyes. “Let alone find a disc you could record on?”

“A lot of hard work!” Grian chirped, lounging on the bed. He had tried to kick him out multiple times but Grian had refused. Eventually, he had moved over, deciding that being bored wasn’t worth having the bed to himself.

“Fucking ridiculous man.” Tommy said. He ignored the chiding look. “I wish we could have done that on our server. We just had the basic discs, not that they aren’t pretty pog though! But it would have been cool to be able to record songs, I bet Wilbur would have loved it.” At the thought of it, his smile dimmed a bit.

“Do you have any favorite discs?” Grian asked, propping his chin on his hands. Luckily, he didn’t ask who Wilbur was. He didn’t want to talk about him.

“Sure, do! I have- had a Cat and Mellohi.” Tommy said. He frowned. He really needed to get those back soon. But at the same time, Dream’s words played in his head, admonishing him over holding on so tightly to pieces of plastic. But they were his pieces of plastic. Why couldn’t he want them back?

“Oh, those songs are pretty good! If you want, I can grab you some discs and a jukebox. One of my friends has a record store in the shopping district with all of the discs.” Grian offered. Tommy’s eyes went wide.

“Really?” He asked. That sounded pretty pog! There had never been many discs on the server, tracking dungeons down was hard and no one had much time to go find them all, let alone trade away copies. It was part of why Cat and Mellohi had been so special to him, he had never had that luck before. He’d love to see an entire disc store. “Like, all of them?”

“Yeah!” Grian said, smiling back. “It’ll be no problem at all! I can pick them up later at the store and bring them by soon.”

Tommy’s smile dropped. Store. He didn’t exactly bring any money or resources along and he didn’t want to go further into debt. They already had way too much over him with the potions

and stuff like that. “Maybe, you shouldn’t. I’m not exactly sticking around for very long. And I don’t exactly have any money or anything.”

He didn’t know how to quite describe it but Grian’s smile went a bit... odd at that. Annoyed and unhappy and Tommy cringed back, certain the other was going to snap at him but determined not to run away. He knew his words were sound but Grian had been so nice so maybe he really had done something wrong.

Grian’s face fell when he saw Tommy flinch. “Oh, birdie, I’m not going to hurt you!” He said. Tommy stared as the other reached out a hand, frozen no matter how much he willed his limbs to move. But Grian didn’t hit him. Instead, he very carefully rubbed through his hair, gently tugging on the tangled curls.

“What the fuck man?” Tommy said. Grian tipped his head to the side, a soft smile spreading across his face, replacing the frown that had briefly been there.

“I’m not going to hurt you.” He said softly. “Trust me, I won’t.”

“I’m not scared.” Tommy said, tilting his chin up. Lie, lie, lie, his heart seemed to say, thudding against his ribs with each word. He was lying. But he wasn’t going to tell Grian that. Big Man Tommy didn’t get afraid of anyone.

“It’s okay.” Grian said as if Tommy hadn’t even spoken. “And I’m getting you the gifts because I want you to have them and I think you deserve to have them.”

“For what?” Tommy said. What had he done to deserve it? Was that supposed to be a request or sometime or another one of their bullshit statements? He hadn’t done anything to deserve getting some discs. In fact, he was pretty sure if they knew who he was, what he could do, they’d keep them away from him.

“You were so sweet during the medical examination. I hate when I have to get bandaged up but you didn’t bite them once.” grian said. Tommy eyed him skeptically. Sweet? What kind of standards was he using? “Well, not successfully anyways.”

“You bit them?”

“Five times.” Grian said matter of factly. “Left a few scars on Doc too. Xisuma or Cub usually had to hold me when I got examined the first couple of times after I got here.”

Tommy frowned. Hold him? “Why didn’t they just let you not do it or whatever? Why hold you?”

“It makes sense if you think about it. First time, I wasn’t exactly in the best shape and they couldn’t wait to start checking me over and making sure I was healthy. The others felt terrible afterwards too, I got so much free stuff for it.” Grian said, shaking his head. “But they wanted to make sure I was okay and decided they’d rather deal with a quick bite then let me hole up somewhere and get an infection.”

“My last server was pretty terrible and medical attention was hard to come by so I got in the habit of just never going in. So they made a habit of swinging by and dragging me in so I didn’t keep dying.” Grian rubbed the back of his head. “Honestly, they could have avoided a few scars if they had been willing to fight back. I took a chunk out of Xisuma’s armor once.”

“You’re kidding.” Tommy said. He had hit that armor a few times, tried biting it and it was as solid as a rock. “But didn’t I bite you?”

“I heal fast, mate.” Grian said proudly, showing his arm. Tommy looked at it closely, his face creasing up in a confused frown. He knew that he had bit the other, had dug in enough to taste blood but there wasn’t even a drop of blood left.

“Pog.” He breathed. That was so cool.

“I know, right?” Grian said. “It’s a little slower on big wounds, hence their worries about infections, but it comes in handy! Shashwammy and the others are big worrywarts, they don’t like seeing people hurt. So, they do what they can to get you in without hurting you and then try to make up for it afterwards. Neat system if you want free stuff.”

He... guessed that made sense? Wilbur had always gotten mad at him during the war when he tried to hide getting hurt but that was a long time ago. The motherhenning had faded during Pogtopia. He had stumbled in with an arrow to the knee, terrified that his brother would be mad he had gotten hurt, only to have the other ask a brief question about who did it and turn away when they found out it was a skeleton. It had stung, to wrap that wound alone. Before, he could see his brother holding him still to be examined. “Free stuff you say?” Tommy said contemplatively.

It was different if he could scam people out of stuff. Scamming was annoying and bad but the stuff would still be his. Free and clear and they couldn’t get mad because they fell for it!

Grian laughed. “Oh, we got a little scammer, don’t we! I can teach you all about that, I’ve scammed people out of so many things. It’s great.” Grian said. “One time, I spent an entire season just stealing people’s doors.”

Tommy barked out a laugh. “That’s hilarious!” He bet Tubbo would have loved doing it. For a second the thought made his heart dip but he shook it away. They could try it out when he got back. “What’s a season?”

“Oh, you don’t know? Every once in a while, when a major coding change occurs for servers, we start a new world. Every time we change worlds, it starts a new season which lasts for as long as we’re in that world.” Grian explained. “Otherwise, we would get bored pretty quickly. Currently, we’re in season seven.”

“Huh.” Tommy said, tilting his head to the side. “Sounds pretty pog, big man.”

“Have you never been on a server that restarted or moved worlds?” Grian asked, adjusting his wings slightly. Tommy shifted a little as feathers brushed against his arm. It was odd. Grian’s feathers felt softer somehow than Phil’s, less bristly.

“No?” He said distracted. “Most of my servers either closed before they really cared about people getting bored or they were big ones that didn’t restart. Ran around on Hypixel a bit though, think they did that?”

What would that be like? To stay in a world so long that you could get bored? He couldn’t even imagine it. Dream SMP had been his longest world and nobody had cared about any coding updates or anything. Dream had never once mentioned any plans to leave the world or restart.

It was interesting to think about. It drew him in, the idea of it. Being able to explore a whole new world, see all the new changes in person instead of marathoning videos with Tubbo. But on the other hand, he was kind of sick of starting from nothing. Far too much of his stuff had disappeared to gunpowder laced craters, far too many wooden tools crafted.

“Hypixel does try to stay up to date though they’re slowed with the custom coding already present in their world. I feel for the admins, a lot of work goes into preparing the server for a coding restart.” Grian said, shaking his head. “We just hop worlds entirely.”

“Sounds weirdchamp, man.” Tommy said. He shifted his hand, still thinking as he slowly got comfortable on the bed. “How could you get bored of a world?”

“Well, how else?” Grian said. “Once you get god tools, build a mega base, and build all the stuff that comes into your head, what else is there to do? We’ve made some good games and the prank wars are amazing. But eventually enough of us get fidgety and start talking about new building plans and then new coding is revealed that has interesting stuff for building and we move. Easy.”

“Easy.” Tommy said with a snort. “Don’t you get distracted by the rebuilding?”

Surely they had to rebuild pretty often if they got god weapons so fast, why not build their new ideas then? Grian was making no fucking sense right now. He may not build much himself, though when he did it was incredible and perfect, but he had heard the other builders on the server bitch about the time lost rebuilding.

“Rebuilding?” Grian echoed, tilting their head to the side. “What do you mean by that?”

“Yeah!” Tommy said, waving his hands. “Like, if someone gets mad and pulls out the TNT and blows up all your builds. Wouldn’t the rebuilding be enough to distract you and let you use your new ideas? And you’d have to get new swords and armor pretty often.”

“Uh, no?” Grian said. He tilted his head to the side, face twisted in confusion. “No one has ever blown up another person’s base, on purpose at least. Goodness knows that Scar is a bit of a creeper magnet. But that would be rude.”

“Rude?” Tommy laughed, this time a bit more hysterical. Rude? How could it just not happen here? That was impossible! He had never been on a server where you could just build a house and not expect someone to show up with a stack of TNT. It was practically impossible.

Grian's face did that weird thing where his eyes kind of looked like he saw a baby cow and his smile went all sad. "Do people blow up your base on your home server?" He asked.

Tommy shrugged. "It happens." He said. And Logstedshire was kind of his fault- not his fault. That was his stuff. He gathered it all himself, and Dream wasn't being fair when he blew it up. He wasn't

"Easy." Grian cooed. There was a soft chiming sound but Tommy ignored it, focusing on the feeling of a warm hand on his shoulder. He almost opened his mouth, asked for something more solid, warm, asked to be wrapped up in Grian's wings like Philza used to do before forcing himself to stop. He wasn't going to be pathetic and rude.

"I'm fine." Tommy said, trying to shrug off Grian's hand but it didn't move. "I'm fine, stop trying to touch me. Why are you obsessed with touch anyways?"

"I'm not obsessed, it's just. Hm. Best way to phrase it, is that it's just kind of... common on our server? You sling an arm around a friend's shoulder or hug someone when they're upset." Grian explained. "And you seem upset so I was hoping it might help you out like it did me."

"Well, it doesn't." Tommy snapped, hunching over. It made his skin feel tingly and odd like ants were hiding under his skin or something. And it was weird, every time they reached out to him, he expected pain but it hadn't happened yet. But he didn't like it. Even if it didn't hurt, he didn't like how powerless he felt when Xisuma held him still. "Fucking piss off with that."

"Okay."

"Oh, fuck- Wait." Tommy said, blinking quickly. "You agreed?"

He hadn't been expecting agreement. He had been expecting a scolding, a sigh, maybe Grian realizing that this whole situation wasn't worth it. Dream would have sighed, maybe given him a good swat for insolence and past Wilbur would have dragged him into a hug so tight he couldn't breath, teasing him about being snappy. Not agreement.

Grian shrugged. "Like I said, getting hugs and stuff is supposed to make you feel better. Comforted. If you don't like it or it's making you uncomfortable, I can stop. And I can talk to the others to get them to slow it down too. No worries mate."

"Huh." Tommy said, sitting back. He shoved down the little complaining voice, the one that whined that he needed that touch. That it was so long since anyone was willing to reach out to him and was happy about it. But he didn't need it and it was better to cut it off, rip it out before it turned venomous or whatever. Before they realized how annoyingly clingy he was. "And 'ow do I know you aren't lying?"

"I can send him a message if you want, mate." Grian offered. "And show you his answer. Xisuma would hate to make you uncomfortable, he works really hard to make sure everyone is happy. And if this doesn't make you happy, birdie, he'll stop. Easy as that."

"No, it's fine." Tommy said, shaking his head. "I don't want to bother the guy."

“It’s not bothering someone if you want to talk to them.” Grian said. His hand slipped up before immediately falling away, his eyes glancing to the side. “He’s not going to be mad or annoyed that you wanted to message him. In fact, I think he’d be very happy to receive a message from you even if it’s through me.”

Tommy shook his head. “No, it’s fine.”

A bit of a cop out maybe but comm messages were... unreliable. Dangerous. He wouldn’t be able to gauge their reaction, adjust how he stepped. He wasn’t going to roll over and show his belly but if there was one thing he took away from Dream was that it was easier to punch someone in person.

He’d stopped messaging Dream because the bitch would complain about his messages constantly popping up. Definitely not because of the disappointment they had in him, but because they didn’t deserve his awesome messages.

Grian tilted his head, something dark flashing through his eyes before disappearing. “If that’s what you want.” he said, shaking his head. “What would you prefer to do instead? We can keep watching funny videos, I’ve got some amazing Poultry Man videos.”

Tommy thought about it for a moment. “Food” He said. “I definitely want some food. I’m fucking starving and you guys said you’d feed me.”

Grian laughed. “I should have guessed. I’ll be right back then.” he said. Tommy ignored the aching sense of loss as Grian jumped up from the bed, wrapping his arms around himself. It’d be silly to miss him, they’d be coming right back. The other walked across the floor, creepily silent, opening the door with a click. But he didn’t walk out, instead leaning out to grab something before turning back and pushing the door shut behind him.

“We already had some food set just outside for when you woke up.” Grian explained, seeing the confusion on his face. “We didn’t think you’d want to be left alone for too long. Probably should have grabbed it after they checked you over but I got distracted with the videos.”

“Why?” Tommy said with a snort. He knew this game already. Dream had already pulled it on him and he wasn’t going to let it slide again. “To make sure I’m not causing trouble on your precious server?”

“No, mate!” Grian said, his wings flaring. “It’s because of-” He paused

“Because of what?” Tommy snarled. He already knew how it would go. They would say he was a stranger, an unknown factor. They couldn’t let him go running around willy nilly or even leave him alone.

Grian carefully set the bowl down on the nightstand. “This might be a conversation that’s better for another to have with you.” He said quietly. Tommy slammed his hands against the blankets.

“What is it? Why can’t you tell me.” He snapped. What’s so hard about it? Grian just had to admit that he was watching him. He wanted to hear the words said out loud, to confirm once

and for all that these people were a bunch of fake bastards. “Well? I’m waiting.”

“Really, mate, I really don’t think this is a good conversation.” Grian said with a wince. His feathers were completely fluffed out, wings partially open as if he was preparing to leap into the air. “How about you just eat your food and we can watch some more videos, yeaah?”

“I want to know.” Tommy said, his voice rushing to a yell. “What the fuck are you hiding from me? If you want to go and kill me, then go ahead! Do it! Stop pussyfooting around! TELL ME!”

“It’s not us wanting to kill you, it’s you trying to kill yourself!” Grian yelled, his voice jumping an octave. The words dropped into the air like a stone. Tommy froze, watching how Grian slumped in on himself. “In the ocean, when we got there, you weren’t trying to swim at all. You were just going to let yourself drown.”

“No- I-?” He didn’t know what to say. What were you supposed to say to that?

Part of him wanted to reject it, tell Grian he must have seen something wrong. That Big Man Tommy would never try to kill himself. That would be the coward’s way out, the way that would let Dream win. The green bitch would gloat for years about Big Man Tommy being gone and continue his attacks against his home and friends. He’d never let him have that.

Another part, a quieter part, wasn’t so sure. It whispered of tall pillars and a long fall. Of mornings waking up deep under the surface, choking on salt water.

“And I know, I really know, how annoying it is to have someone constantly hovering around.” Grian said. His wings were tightly pinned against his back, his hands anxiously twisting. “But it was terrifying to go out there and find someone just sinking down and then having them collapse on top of you when you finally get them to safety. And Stress and Doc said that if you had inhaled anymore water, you could have done serious damage to yourself, respawn or no respawn. Drowning is a terrible way to go.”

“Huh.” Tommy said. The word hung empty in the air. He felt like he should have more of a reaction to this news. But all he could feel was empty. Numb.

“Xisuma said for now, you’d need to have someone around you to make sure your safe.” Grian said, softly. They swayed slightly, leaning against the wall as their eyes slipped shut. “Our world is safe, safer than any other, but there’s still ways to get yourself hurt, especially if you try.”

The door was pushed open, nearly slamming into the wall and Tommy started upright, glancing over. Instinctively, he fumbled for a weapon, his heart thudding faster when there was no cold metal at his side or flicker from his inventory. Grian’s reaction was much more dramatic, the other jumping and spinning around with the wings flared wide. “Everything alright in here?” The stranger asked. “I heard screaming.”

They didn’t look like any of the others he had met but they seemed oddly familiar. Their skin was pale, the three scars slashed across their face barely showing up. They had warm brown eyes and soft curly hair, a top hat settled on top of their head. They grinned at him, showing

sharp teeth. When he glanced down, he could see that his hands were tipped with claws as well, definitely a hybrid but one he didn't recognize.

"No, I'm not sure. I- uh- told Tommy why someone needs to be here watching him all the time." Grian said. "And why." Scar made a clicking sound with his tongue, slipping inside and kicking the door closed. He threw one arm over Grian's shoulder, making the other wobble slightly.

"That sure is a conversation." He said, eyeing Tommy. Tommy glared back, holding so tightly to the blankets that his knuckles went white. What was he supposed to say? That it wasn't true? That he didn't believe them?

Because he did. He might not remember being in the ocean that well, but he remembers the sense of despair and loss that had plagued him then. That had made him mine a massive amount of blocks, build it into a massive tower, and sit at the top. If he had fallen into the ocean soon after... He wasn't quite sure what he would have done.

Whether he wanted them to watch him all the time, that was another matter. As far as he was concerned, what he did with his final life was his business.

"Maybe you should leave the room for a second." Scar said to Grian. Tommy stiffened. Was he going to be punished for upsetting Grian? For a moment, he leaned back, poised to call for Grian, ask him to stay. The name died on his tongue as he hesitated, watching the other disappear through the door. Calling Grian back wouldn't help.

Those brown eyes turned towards him. "Well, the Jellie is officially out of the bag isn't it?" Scar said. The fuck was a jellie? "Mind if I sit down?"

"Do what you want." Tommy mumbled. It was their server anyway. There wasn't exactly a good reason to say no. "Look, I don't want you guys watching me all the time. This is my life and my business."

"When you entered the server, it did become our business, per se." Scar said, voice low and gentle like he was trying to coax a scared cat. "We're not going to let you hurt yourself."

"I don't see why it matters to you guys." Tommy said, changing tactics. "After all, the only reason I'm currently around is because of a glitch that's causing more work for an admin. Losing my last life would get me out of your hair faster."

It was cold, partially a lie, but he didn't regret it. He wanted to shock Scar, let the other see how selfish he could be. That things would be better if he was left alone. He didn't want a babysitter for the rest of his time on the server and if it took saying this to get them off his back, so be it. He knew Dream would have agreed with the logic of it.

Fuck, maybe dying was the easiest way to get back to when things were normal. Ghostbur had appeared after Wilbur had died, hadn't he? Maybe if he died, he'd come back as a ghost on the Dream SMP server and haunt the green bitch into an early grave. Respawn glitch fixed, Hermits and him could move on with their lives.

“You’re not dying.” Scar said. Simple. Straightforward.

“Why not?” Tommy challenged. “I’m on my last life. Wouldn’t take a lot.”

“Last life- Oh. That explains rather a lot about your code.” Scar said, blinking. “Your server has a limited number of lives?”

“Yeah?” Tommy said. It had been a rather abrupt announcement. Through the first few deaths, everyone had been calm and then that fact was announced. Honestly, once the initial panic died down, it wasn’t too terrible. He had pulled through most of what the server had thrown at him and felt confident he’d outlive Dream at least.

“Hermitcraft doesn’t have a finite life system. When you’re here, you have infinite respawns.” Scar explained slowly. Now it was Tommy’s turn to process that, mulling the information over.

“You’re kidding.” He said. Dream had always said infinite respawn servers were a pain to manage. He remembered, maybe, being on a few before. 2b2t and Hypixel came to mind. But those were huge servers, with admin teams to handle the glitches and issues that came up. Dream had insisted that alone, he couldn’t be expected to keep up with them fucking around. They’d have to face the consequences for being dumbasses.

Honestly, he was more pissed that the green bitch had turned off the ability to hop servers and then made the announcement. Meaning that after dying he’d get stuck there. Normally, he would have forced Wilbur to move on when they dropped to their last life, heading back to Hypixel with a nice big team to run it.

Fuck it. It was the green bitch’s funeral. Ghost Tommy could make his life hell, no ghost sweat.

But that didn’t explain Hermitcraft. He had only ever heard of one admin for the entire server, the infamous Xisuma. How would they even manage that? “Why?” Tommy said.

“Because that’s what a good admin does.” Scar said, frowning. “Why wouldn’t he? Hermitcraft would be a lot less fun if dying was permanent and we got kicked into spectator mode.”

There was a muffled snort. “Trust me, Scar knows a lot about the respawn system.” Grian said, his voice muffled through the door. “He can’t go a single day without getting killed by a zombie or crashing into a wall.”

“No, no, that is a lie! I am a very accomplished individual! Grian is a liar and a scoundrel!” Scar said, shaking his head. Involuntarily, Tommy snorted, hands coming up to cover his mouth. “Oh, come on man! I’m not that bad.”

“Oh, did I besmirch your dignity? I wonder what the video compilation says about that. ” Grian said. Scar made a comical face, so full of wide eyed offense that Tommy burst into full fledged laughter.

“You said you deleted that!” He said. “You promised! You signed a contract and everything!

“Clearly, you didn’t read the fine print.” Grian said. There was a soft thump like someone leaning against the door. “I kept the video and all rights to future blackmail. It was on page 78 of the book.”

“You knew I’d get bored of trying to read it by page 10.” Scar accused. Tommy stiffened, glancing between Scar and the door. Would Grian be punished for this? Scar didn’t seem very happy right now and he had to have some kind of authority with Grian agreeing to leave so easily.

He could take him, he decided. Easy. Scar might have fangs and claws, but he was built like a soggy noodle. Grian might be kind of a bitch sometimes but they didn’t deserve to be hurt.

“I’ll get my revenge on you.” Scar said, shaking his head with a sigh. “When you least expect it! I’ll have my revenge!”

Tommy made a soft snarling noise, lunging forward. Not if he stopped them first, distracted the other. Scar squawked as they tumbled off the bed, arms coming up to defend his face. “Leave him alone!” He yelled.

“Ow! Why!” Scar said. His hits thudded uselessly against the other’s forearms but Tommy kept an eye on those claws. He wasn’t going to let the other take a swipe at his eyes. “I- stop! We can talk about this!”

“You’re not going to hurt him!” Tommy snarled. The next one was a good hit to their cheek and Scar yelped. Warm hands closed around his shoulders, towing him back. Tommy struggled kicking and pulling.

“Tommy!” Grian said. Tommy stilled, looking at him. They were frowning now, a real frown. “Why did you hit Scar? He’s practically defenseless!”

“He was going to hurt you, you fucking idiot!” Tommy snapped, gesturing at where Scar was pushing himself to his feet, rubbing at their cheek. Fuck, this was what he got for being nice. “I was just trying to help!”

Grian’s frown deepened and for a moment, he braced for the hit. Wouldn’t be the first time he got hit for trying to help someone out. But instead, the avian snorted, shaking his head. Tommy watched incredulously as the other started laughing. “Tommy, Scar wasn’t going to hurt me.” He said. “For one, the man is terrible at fighting.”

“True but hurtful.”

“For another, he’s my best friend. We prank each other all the time. If he was actually mad about it, he’d talk to me about it, not plan revenge over it. And he wouldn’t hurt me for revenge.” Grian said. “I mean, for one, if you want to measure who’s the more dangerous one, it’s definitely me.”

“Hey, I’ve gotten you a few times.” Scar interjected. He adjusted his hat, noticing Tommy’s incredulous look. “Infinite respawns, remember? And Xisuma lowered the pain feed a lot too. Most fighting is purely friendly and pranks are more common.”

“That’s stupid.” Tommy said with a frown. He had noticed that his stomach hadn’t hurt quite as much as he expected it to, chalking that up to the healing potions. But that did mean he had attacked Scar for nothing. “I- Fuck. Sorry.”

“It’s not a problem at all. Didn’t hurt that much.” Scar said, waving him off. “I’ll just drink a healing potion and be right as rain in a jiffy.”

Tommy choked a bit slightly, eyeing Scar but the other didn’t move. Didn’t tense up or lunge closer or anything. Grian released his shoulders, making him start and spin around. Grian put his hands up, taking a step away.

“Sorry about grabbing you.” Grian said, smiling. Tommy stared at him. “I know you don’t want to be touched.

Oh. Right. That. “It’s fine.” Tommy mumbled, hunching over slightly. He rubbed at his stomach, wincing slightly.

“How about I make it up to you by showing you the video compilation?” Grian offered, taking a step closer to the bed and flawlessly ignoring Scar’s squawk of dismay. Seeing Tommy’s hesitance, he continued. “Scar, do you really mind us watching it?”

“It’s embarrassing, but not really.” Scar said, winking at Tommy when he glanced back. “I’ll just stick around and tell you the real story behind each clip.”

Grian clapped. “Perfect! Tommy, you can eat your food while we watch. It’ll be so much fun!” He hopped back onto the bed, moving back so there was plenty of room. With a hum, Grian’s comm was back in his hand and he was scrolling through the screen.

Cautiously, Tommy settled back on the bed. He started as a bowl was laid on his lap, glancing up. Scar settled onto the bed next to him, smiling. “Don’t forget your food.” He said. “Golden applesauce again. Yum!”

For some reason, the words sounded familiar. He just couldn’t put this finger on it. Tommy stared down at the bowl, thinking. What was he forgetting?

“Got it!” Grian crowed. He held his comm out, adjusting it so they could all see. “I present to you, the pride of my video making skills.”

It couldn’t be too important. Tommy decided, sticking a spoonful of delicious applesauce in his mouth. He was probably just misremembering something. He had never met the other guy before after all.

There's a proverb that says if a frog is placed in cold water and the temperature is suddenly raised, they'll jump out. Tommy isn't a frog, but what happens when the temperature drops just before he realizes it's too hot?

Also, respawn lore! In this universe, infinite respawn servers are actually the most common kind. The three lives rules and server lock was Dream's first attempt at controlling the people who lived on his server. He also upped the pain feed while most admins dull it down so that wounds and deaths don't hurt as much. Usually, the only times you see life locks and/or realistic pain feeds are in hardcore or modded servers. Tommy would know this, but he was pretty young when he joined Dream SMP and Wilbur didn't have a good reason to talk about respawn systems before he went off the deep end. He just thinks that the change was normal, that most small servers have these features, and everyone was just a bit annoyed about the sudden system change.

On a better note, I love comments so much. Even if I don't reply, know that I appreciate comments and reading them makes me happy! Someone did ask me if I had a discord server for these stories or was part of a Dark SBI server and the answer is no to both. I would be interested in joining a dark SBI server, but I haven't seen any active invitations around tumblr or ao3. Usually, I just show up in my friend, Kindryte's discord at 2 am, babbling about my latest plotbunny. They're the best. Maybe in the future I'll create my own server, and I'll keep you guys updated on that!

A Bowl of Soup

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Tommy briefly believes he's been poisoned.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

After the golden applesauce, there was a warm bowl of soup, still steaming slightly. He could feel the heat of it through the carefully carved bowl and Tommy sniffed it cautiously. One couldn't be too cautious, they could have drugged it after all.

Part of him wanted to skip eating it. Easier way to make sure they weren't drugging him was to get his own food. Eating the golden applesauce had already been a bit stupid, under the tingle from the golden apples regenerative properties, there could have been anything in there. But the other part of him screamed at him to eat it.

He had been living off of whatever he could scavenge, simple bowls of soup, and whatever he could get from his livestock. But this was a proper mushroom soup, not one taken from a mushroom cow that had been stressed by the frequent explosions.

Grian flopped back on the bed. "I can't believe you showed him that video." Grian said. "I swore you to secrecy on that!"

"No. No. You showed him that compilation." Scar said, pointing a finger at Grian. "You can't call me out on that. That compilation meant everything is fair game and I can show him whatever I like!"

"Secrecy." Grian hissed.

Tommy rolled his eyes, taking a bite of soup. He let out a little hum of delight. It was warm and rich with plenty of meaty mushrooms. He swallowed, going back for another, but on the third one, he frowned.

There was an odd flavor lingering on his tongue, one that he couldn't place. It had an oddly tingly and spicy taste. He couldn't think of anything that matched the taste but it definitely didn't belong in a mushroom stew. He slowly lowered the spoon into the bowl, staring at the delicious stew with horror.

He had trusted them, enough to eat their food, and they had poisoned him for it. Was this supposed to be some kind of kind way of getting rid of him? Tommy felt his eyes warming, shoving the soup away fast enough that it nearly splashed over the side of the bowl. He had trusted them.

Prime, even Dream hadn't tried to poison him. They had destroyed his food but they had not tried to poison him. He couldn't remember Wilbur doing it either, outside of the few times he dosed him with weakness when he was younger and refused to go to bed. He had always thought that poison would taste bitter and disgusting but both of the bowls had been absolutely delicious. Even now, he still wanted to go back for another bite.

His stomach lurched and Tommy clamped his hand over his mouth. Should he throw up? But how embarrassing would that be, to throw up in front of them and showing his weakness.

"Tommy?" Grian said. Tommy glanced up at him, eyes wide. "Are you okay? Do you not like the soup?"

"You poisoned me." Tommy said. Was that why he had shown him the videos? To make sure he was too distracted to notice the odd taste? Tommy wanted to take a swing at them but he forced himself to hold still, Wilbur's words echoing in his mind. The more you moved, the faster the poison would spread. If he held still enough, maybe he could work through it before it killed him.

"Poison?" Grian said, eyes going wide and wings fluffing up. "Why would you think that, mate? We would never try to poison you."

"Yes, you would." Tommy shot back, his hands balling into fists. How could the other look him in the eye and play innocent like he didn't know what was going on? How could they look him in the eye and betray him?

Probably easily, he thought darkly. After all, Technoblade and Tubbo both betrayed him and he had known them for years.

"Tommy, that doesn't even make sense. Why would we poison you?" Grian said, glancing at Scar. The other was glancing between Tommy and the soup. "We're helping you mate, Stress and Doc even fixed up your stomach!"

"Probably because you'd feel guilty for just shoving a sword through me and being done with it." Tommy shot back. "Bet that would hurt your good guy rep."

Prime, no wonder Xisuma had asked him for his comm. Without his comm, he couldn't check his health for poison. He just had to guess and try to remember what he knew of poison. Not for the first time but maybe in a different way than before, he cursed Wilbur for not teaching him about poisons.

Was it the shivers first or the pain? Was the nausea he felt a side effect or his horror? When would the distinctive red bruising from poison appear on his skin? Tommy flinched back as Grian reached for his arm, making a hissing noise. "Don't fucking touch me!" He snapped. "Fuck you!"

"Tommy I promise, we're not trying to poison you. Trust me, mate, no one is trying to hurt you." Grian said in a sickeningly sweet tone. Tommy scoffed. Easy for him to say. He knew that he was lying, the soup didn't taste right at all.

“I bet the admins who deleted glitched players thought they were helping.” He snapped, cruelly feeling a bit smug at Grian’s flinch. Prime, why did they still have to pretend?

“Tommy, I-”

“Here, I’ll show you.” Scar interrupted. Tommy glanced down, automatically reaching forward to stop him. But in a flicker of blue magic, the bowl landed neatly in Scar’s hand. Scar scooped up a bite, humming in delight when he tasted it.

“Are you a fucking idiot?” Tommy said, lunging forward. Scar laughed, leaning away and holding the bowl just out of reach. As if this was some sort of fucking game. “Spit that out! You’re going to be poisoned!”

“It’s all good.” Scar said. He took another bite before speaking again, meeting Tommy’s horrified eyes. “I was in the same boat when I showed up too, you know? Grian, see, he comes from a world where cooking is more common and they don’t use crafting tables so he doesn’t know.”

“I don’t know what?” Grian asked. Tommy stared at Scar, brow furrowed. The other looked completely fine, not even nauseous. Maybe it was because he had eaten less? Or because he was a hybrid?

“Stress likes to add extra spice to their soup. It’s not something possible when you’re making it with crafting tables because the magic creates the food, no option for spices.” Scar explained, setting the bowl back down carefully on the bed. “Do you have any people who like cooking or baking without a crafting table in your world?”

“No- well, Niki did. With her bakery before it was destroyed.” Tommy said, chewing his lip as he stared at the soup. Phil might have cooked too but that was years ago and he couldn’t really remember much about what the man did. Wilbur had just used the crafting table, always joking that he had far too much to keep an eye on to worry about cooking. “Why does that matter?”

“Like I said, with a crafting table or getting stew from a mooshroom, you don’t have much room to deviate from the recipe.” Scar explained. “If you use a crafting table, it’s just a handful of mushrooms and a bowl with a bit of magic. But on Hermitcraft, most of us like to do more advanced cooking like stews outside of the crafting table. As you might have noticed, foods from the crafting table compared to handmade tend to taste different because a player has more control over taste while cooking than crafting.”

That... Could make sense. Niki’s bread had always been incredibly tasty, soft and fluffy and so buttery that he didn’t need to dip it in milk. When he had tried to make bread, it always tasted kind of like dirt and it felt like chewing through a clod of dirt too. Dry and so crumbly that it fell apart as soon as he took a bite. Was that what was happening in this stew?

“My home world was more modern, I got a lot of my food from stores. There were more options too. We didn’t really use crafting tables much at all.” Grian said, nostalgic. “I guess I didn’t think about the taste difference, I had mushroom stew before so to me that’s just a pretty good bowl of soup.”

Scar clapped his hands. "There you have it." He explained. "It's not poison because I would be poisoned as well after all!"

"Sorry." Tommy said gruffly. He folded his arms, scowling at the blanket. He didn't quite trust the other but it was true that other than nausea, he wasn't feeling very poisoned. Nothing hurt and his vision stayed steady. He didn't quite regret his reaction but he didn't want them to think he was a brat.

"It's really fine. I had the same reaction as you when I joined Hermitcraft after all!" Scar said. Tommy looked at him skeptically. The other looked pretty rich and snobby, not like the kind of person who went around eating crafting table food if it was bad or whatever.

"You're kidding." Tommy said doubtfully.

"It's true! My previous world, the one I spent most of my life in, relied heavily on crafting table magic. By the time I moved here, I mostly ate golden apples because as much as they were a pain to gather materials for, they kept me alive and didn't taste horrible. The others ended up teaching me how to cook when I joined." Scar said. "I kept throwing out what food they gave me because I thought it had spoiled or something."

"I didn't know that." Grian said with a frown. "You never talked about this before."

"Honestly, I forgot about that." Scar said, adjusting his hat. "It was a long time before, and definitely before you joined Grian. After a while, I got used to cooking more. I still like golden apples though."

"They're the best." Tommy agreed. A rare treat, even on the servers before Dream SMP where he had more time to gather resources and less people blowing them up. It was why he had been less cautious about the applesauce.

"I can't give you more applesauce because too much and the regenerative magic will overload your system. If you were a hybrid, we could be less careful but too much regenerative magic is bad for humans." Scar said. "But I can go craft you a bowl of soup. I have a crafting table and there's still mushrooms in the kitchen area. I can even do it in front of you so you can see it's safe."

"But-" Scar hushed Grian.

"I'd rather the kid eat then stop eating because he's worried about poison." He said. Scar looked up, meeting Tommy's eyes. "Everyone's so fussy. Crafting table food might not be as tasty or as healthy but it's good!"

Tommy hesitated. On one hand, he'd know there wasn't any poison in it and it would taste the same as what he was used to. If better because it would be the proper recipe instead of a stressed mooshroom cow or whatever mushrooms he could scrounge up under the trees around his beach.

But on the other hand, the bowl of soup they had given him had been incredibly tasty. Better than anything he had eaten before, a taste that hit right in the memories. He could see Phil or

Techno making a soup like that, back when they were a family and they thought he was worth the effort. It was good, way better than crafting table soup. His stomach rumbled at the thought of taking another bite.

“I’ll take the crafting table soup.” He said reluctantly. Tommy kept his hand in his lap, refusing to snatch back the soup when Scar picked it up. It was better to be safer and he shouldn’t get too used to the good stuff, not when he would be back on his server soon. He didn’t have time for fancy cooking when he needed to gather the resources to fight Dream.

But maybe. Maybe he could try making it afterwards. Tubbo would like that, yeah? Playing around in the kitchen again like they did in Niki’s bakery. Even if he would have to stop the other from putting honey in everything.

Grian sighed, watching Scar walk out through the door. “Sorry about that mate. Like I said, we didn’t really use crafting tables in my world so I never really thought about the taste for someone who always used the crafting table.” Grian said. Tommy rolled his eyes.

“Why are you apologizing? That’s dumb.” Tommy said, shaking his head. Grian chuckled. “You grew up in a more modern world?”

“Yeah.” Grian said. But he didn’t look too excited to be talking about it. “We didn’t have much of this stuff. I don’t know who set the server up but the coding meant that most armor sets weren’t used and crafting table magic was nonexistent.”

“You’re kidding me.” Tommy said, perking up in interest. Even Hypixel didn’t lock down that kind of stuff. If anything, most servers pushed to expand it. And armor? Tommy was confident he could win any fight, armor or no armor but still. “What did you guys use to fight then?”

“You, uh, weren’t supposed to? It was a finite life server so fighting wasn’t allowed. Even if some people got away with it.” Grian said with a frown. Tommy nodded. Made sense, Dream was the kind of bitch who got away with everything. Every server probably had a Dream, it wouldn’t surprise him.

“Makes sense. Always has to be that one bitch who ruins things and makes everything into a fight.” Tommy said. L’Manburg, George’s house, even his discs were something Dream was willing to fight him for. Even when the bastard needed to budge up and leave him alone. “They never punished him either.”

“Yeah.” Grian said. “Even when you try to talk to people who should be helping and instead they brush it off!”

“Exactly!” Tommy said, waving his hands. “And it’s like, yeah I can fight him but why is it always my fault? Why do I have to be the one to deal with him instead of others growing a fucking backbone?”

“It’s frustrating.” Grian said, glaring down at his hands. It was the first time he had seen the other glaring and he already knew he didn’t like it. Grian looked a bit too much like Philza

when he glared, all disappointed and stuff with a hint of that feral rage. “Looking back now, I just want to punch him.”

“Agreed.” Tommy said darkly. What he wouldn’t give to punch Dream in the face.

They both jumped when the door opened again. “I got the mushrooms!” Scar cheered. He looked in between their startled faces. “Oh. Did I interrupt anything?”

“No, it’s fine. I was just telling Tommy a bit about my old server.” Grian said. Scar nodded, the mushrooms in his hand disappearing with a flicker of light. Tommy watched enviously as with another flicker of light, a crafting table appeared. “Apparently, our servers are pretty similar.”

“Huh.” Scar said, drawing out the word. His hand flickered again, letting the mushrooms fall on the crafting table and he carefully arranged the mushrooms and a bowl on the crafting grid. With a crackle of magic and code, the mushrooms dissolved, beginning to fill the soup bowl. “I guess we’ll just have to bond over our shared past of terrible food instead then.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. These fucks and their bonding stuff, really. He reached his hand out for the bowl of soup, trying not to grimace. It was noticeable how cold it was compared to the piping hot soup from before. He had never really thought about his soup needing that perfect warmth before. But the soup from before had been that perfect warmth where he didn’t need to blow on it at all. This was just room temperature.

He took a bite and nearly spat it out. Compared to the soup from before, it was horribly bland and tasted a bit like someone had tried to puree dirt and gravel together. None of the spicy taste that made his tongue tingle and made him go back for a second bite. He powered through another bite. It was definitely better than the soup he had been eating but not by much.

“Are you sure you don’t want us to go get the other soup?” Grian asked. Tommy shook his head, stubbornly taking another bite. He wasn’t going to get defeated by a fucking bowl of soup. “Okay, birdie. If that’s what you want.”

“It’s not great.” Scar said. With a start, Tommy realized that the other had crafted themselves a bowl of mushroom soup as well. They openly grimaced when they took another bite, glaring at the soup with a look like it had mortally offended them.

“You don’t have to eat it if you don’t want to.” Tommy said, forcing another bite. “If it’s that bad, just stop. Weakling.”

“It’s fine. Eating is always better with other people, right?” Tommy could read through the lines pretty well. With Scar eating as well, he knew the mushrooms weren’t the modded poisonous variety. “You know what? I could eat this entire bowl and eat it faster than you can.”

“Bet you can’t.” Tommy challenged. Grian cackled, rubbing his hands.

“Looks like we have a bet going! What’s the price?” Grian said. “Antes in, I’m going to be the judge.”

“If I win.” Scar hummed. Tommy watched him warily. “Don’t try to bite me again unless I’m trying to hurt you, you nearly got my arm and that was kind of terrifying.”

Tommy smirked. “If I win, I want to see your base.” He said. If he was going to be stuck on Hermitcraft, he wanted to see the builds they were famous for. He had heard the stories but to see them? He would have bragging rights for the rest of ever.

“I don’t know.” Grian said with a frown. “You’re not supposed to be running around too much. You need to let your wounds heal more.”

“I feel fine!” Tommy insisted. It ached yeah, but it was a manageable sort of ache. Not great but not something that made him feel like death walking. “And I’ve run around with worse injuries before. You guys are way too fussy about this stuff.”

“It’ll probably be fine.” Scar said and Tommy had to catch his instinctive snap. Scar had agreed with him? “My base has tons of sitting areas so we could take a break and Doc and Xisuma could come along to keep an eye on his health. It’ll be fun! He can’t stay in this room forever.”

“Fine.” Grian said. He checked his comm. “I won’t be able to stay and watch you so Scar, you might want to set up the camera feature on your comm. Mumbo asked for my opinion on one of his windows.”

“Fine, fine. Leave us! When you come back, I’ll show you proof of my victory!” Scar said, waving a hand at Grian. Tommy watched as Scar pulled out his own sleek comm, one handedly tapping in a few buttons. When he released it, it didn’t fall, instead hovering with the camera trained on them. He couldn’t quite hide his amazement, leaning forward to check it out.

He had seen hovering cameras before but not in years. Mostly, they were in competitions when the cameras were so far away from him he couldn’t see them.

“You like it? I can ask Xisuma to add the function to your comm.” Grian said softly. Tommy glanced down at his bowl with a scowl, a bit embarrassed at being caught.

“It’s fine.” He said. He wouldn’t want more debt on his plate even if having a camera like that would be so pog. “And it’ll be my fucking victory.”

“Hah! I’ll have you know, I’m a champion soup eater.”

“Yeah? Well, I’m the champion champion soup eater!”

Grian hid a laugh, ducking out of the room. Tommy waved goodbye before glancing down at the disgusting bowl of soup in his lap, spoon resting innocently just beside his hand. Time to win this and finally get to do some exploring.

“Kid’s been through a war.” Doc said, browsing the chart in his hands. The scans from the comm weren’t good. The current wounds were the least of their worries, the kid had had long term malnutrition and heavy scarring. He zoomed in, looking at an old arrow wound through the throat, definitely a fatal shot before looking at the nearby burn scars around the kid’s collarbone. “Looks like he tried to fistfight a lit TNT block and lost. Might be some old withering effects too but I can’t tell under the scarring.”

“Will it affect his health in the long term?” Xisuma said, frowning at the screen. Doc put a hand on his shoulder, silently understanding. There was only so much coding could do. If he saw this scarring on a creeper hybrid like him, he’d be more optimistic but Tommy was painfully human. Too human to carry so many gunpowder scars.

It wasn’t common for the health display to have less than the common amount of ‘hearts’ or how far the body could go before it gave out and respawned. In his scant medical knowledge, he’d maybe seen a handful of people, most from anarchist servers who were health locked. Most health locks weren’t permanent, instead being a more extreme server mod, the kind that disappeared when a player left. But a permanent health lock was code deep and hard to work around.

“Too early to say.” Doc said, reaching for his drink. Stress had stepped out earlier to get some fresh potions. “He could work through it and bounce back. Or it could health lock him. My name might be Doc but I’m not a real doctor and most of my knowledge is on hybrids.”

Xisuma sat back, rubbing a hand over his mask. “How could his admin let this get so far?” He wondered, not for the first time. Doc sighed. They had both considered that question, at length and neither had a good answer. “If Tommy was on an anarchy server, I could maybe see it. But I can’t access any of his previous server code.”

“He wasn’t.” Doc looked up, seeing Grian half walk, half stumbled into the room. He stood, opening his arms and letting Grian fall into them with a pained whistle. Doc let himself fold into the hug, his much larger frame nearly hiding Grian entirely.

“You found out more about him?” Xisuma said, pressing into the hug. Doc could feel Grian nod. “Is it bad?”

“I think his server was like mine.” And involuntarily, Doc hissed, a smell of gunpowder filling the air. He hated mentions of Grian’s old server. If it hadn’t been for the server disappearing long before Grian arrived on their server, he would have requested leave to go destroy it himself. “Oh, chill before you stink up the place.”

From Grian’s lighthearted tone, he could tell the request wasn’t serious. “That place is a nightmare.” Doc said. And that was with his own nightmarish experiences to consider.

“I’m not denying that.” Grian said. He’d have to insist Grian visit a nest after this. Doc didn’t always attend the preening sessions, he wasn’t the closest to Grian and they lived far apart. But he’d be happy to help Grian calm down. And with the increasing smell of gunpowder, it looked like he would need to destress as well. Touch helped hold back the need to explode.

“What did he say?” Xisuma pressed gently. Doc hissed, an instinctive back off and felt Xisuma’s chilled hand tug them back into a sitting position on the carpet. Grian had it bad, he practically flopped on top of Doc when they sat down. “You don’t have to talk if you don’t want to but any information helps.”

“It’s fine.” Grian mumbled, shoving himself up so he was sitting pressed against Doc’s side. Doc wrapped an arm around his shoulder, pulling him close. “When I was talking to him, he mentioned that his server had a finite life system and that one person, quote, “Always has to be that one bitch who ruins things and makes everything into a fight”. From the sounds of it, that person hurt him and got away with it.”

Xisuma made a soft, almost burbling noise, and Doc pulled him into the side hug as well. “Don’t turn the room into void.” He said. “I’m not cleaning that up.”

“I won’t.” Xisuma said softly. He stared down at the comm in his hands. “He’s just a teenager. Why isn’t his admin doing better? What is so wrong with his server?”

“I’m guessing a lot, mate.” Grian said. He shifted under their looks. “When we tried to give him soup, he thought we poisoned him. Apparently no one cooks, they all just use the crafting table. He refused to eat it and Scar had to settle him down.”

Yeah, Scar was a good person for that. Doc himself had some experience eating crafting table food and he hated it. But it wouldn’t have been his first thought when faced with a malnourished kid through a hunger strike.

“Is he eating now?” Doc said, frowning. He’d rather not force a kid to eat but if they had to, they’d have to. He was willing to be the bad guy in this situation.

“Yeah. Scar crafted him a bowl of mushroom soup and made a bet about an eating competition. He also ate the golden apple sauce from before.” Grian explained. “From the sound of it, golden apples are his favorite food.”

Understandable, but not good long term. They had to be careful about how many apples they gave the kid or he could get hurt from the constant magic influx. But neither could they feed him other crafting table food long term. For one, it was disgusting. There was a reason why most of the Hermits chose golden carrots when they had to craft food but the kid’s stomach might not be strong enough to handle solid food yet.

And it was nowhere near good for what the kid needed. Crafting table food kept people alive and topped up health, but didn’t do much other than that. No extra calories, no extra nutrients, nothing what a malnourished and still sickly teenager needed.

It was like seeing Grian enter the server all over again. No wonder the other was so frazzled.

“I’ll talk to Stress. And Cub as well. They might have ideas.” Doc said. He was pretty sure Cub came from a primarily crafting food world as well. They might have ideas for getting him on a better diet.

“I’ll do what I can for his coding.” Xisuma said, tapping at the comm screen. “I’m quite concerned that if we can’t get his health up fast enough, he’ll get health locked.”

He could hear the stress his old friend was under. If Tommy got health locked now, it wasn’t a death sentence because of their infinite respawns. But just because he could come back didn’t mean they were fine with the kid dying easier. Anything less than full health was not enough for an unruly teenager, especially a human one.

“Anything else? Was his stomach hurting him?” Doc asked. He knew Stress’ potions were the best but still. They weren’t used to working with a human. Everyone on the server was a hybrid or entity of some kind.

“That?” Grian said, blinking. Doc resisted the urge to shake him, knowing the avian was drawing this out on purpose. “He seemed fine. Not much happened, though he did seem interested in the videos I showed him. And I think he likes Mumbo a lot, he seemed super excited when he showed up on screen.”

“We’ll bring in Mumbo next then. Maybe he can help Tommy open up a bit.” Xisuma said, setting Tommy’s comm aside and picking up his own. “I can message him to come over, he’ll be a good next step especially if Tommy is already fond of him. Maybe he can find out more about what happened.”

“And there’s one other thing.” Grian said. His feathers ruffled, a sure sign the news might not be good. “If Tommy wins the soup eating contest, Scar has to let him visit his base.”

“Absolutely not.” Doc said, shaking his head. “Kid is way too hurt for that. There’s more gunpowder burns on him than most adult creeper hybrids have.”

“I’ve seen the scans as well.” Grian reminded him. “And I think it could be a good idea. Keeping him in one place is making him jittery and paranoid. And if he’s anything like how I was, jittery and paranoid means doing something stupid very soon. You and Shashwammy can come along to keep an eye on him and we’ll make sure he’ll rest enough.”

Xisuma paused. “It could be a good idea.” Xisuma hedged. “I know you’re not fond of it, but maybe some fresh air will help him feel more comfortable. For all of his accidents, Scar’s base is very safe.”

Doc frowned, considering the idea. Part of him wanted to say no. It’d be so much easier if the kid was a creeper hybrid, he’d know what to do. Even easier if they needed a bionic replacement. But unfortunately, surrounding the kid in a TNT barrier or replacing whatever didn’t work with machinery wouldn’t work right now. You can’t replace a brain and wipe away paranoia, at least not yet. They’d have to get Tommy to warm up to them and accept their help in a different way.

Gods, he would never be used to it. Even after helping the other Hermits when they entered the server. “Fine.” Doc said gruffly, glancing back down at Tommy’s comm. “But he isn’t leaving my sight.”

Down on Tommy’s comm, four hearts blinked up at him.

Chapter End Notes

So I have some news! LBAT will be going on a small hiatus for a week, no longer than two. With Snow King ending, I want time to take a step back from writing, relax a bit, and maybe do some work on a few other AUs and fics I have percolating. But never fear! This fic will be back within two weeks!

On a better note, I love comments so much. Even if I don't reply, know that I appreciate comments and reading them makes me happy!

Bad Decisions

Chapter Summary

Trigger warning: minor discussion of food issues

Chapter Notes

I'm baaaaaack.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I can’t believe you ate that much soup.” Scar said, his tone like someone who had witnessed a gruesome murder. “And that fast.”

“Shut up.” Tommy grumbled, arms wrapped around his stomach. Maybe celebrating his clear victory by demanding to eat another bowl of soup and still finishing that before Scar had been a bad idea. His stomach kind of felt like he had swallowed a bowling ball. Both bowls had been small so he thought it had been okay. He had been able to eat more than three bowls of food before exile.

He shuddered slightly, feeling it lurch a bit. Maybe it was a bit too much. But he was not going to throw it back up. Who knew when he would be able to eat next.

“If you’re okay with me touching you. I might be able to help.” Scar offered. Tommy eyed him warily, focusing on the claws. He had sparred enough with Fundy to know that claws could do some damage in the right hands.

“Why?” He asked. He had been the one to be an idiot. What the hell did Scar think he could do to fix that?

Scar smiled conspiratorially, leaning in. “To tell you the truth, I don’t think I was supposed to let you eat that much for this exact reason.” He said. “We’re supposed to be keeping you on small portions until your stomach heals. I don’t want to get in trouble if anyone finds out that I broke the rules.”

Tommy considered that, wincing a bit as he shifted. On one hand, they could still hurt him. On the other, at least it was a clear reason, not the weird touchiness the Hermits had. Helping Tommy helped Scar.

“Fine.” He said, lowering his arms. “But you stop as soon as I tell you or I’ll fucking kill you.”

“Heard and understood.” Scarsaid, shifting closer. Carefully he reached out and Tommy flinched as a hand landed between his shoulder blades. “I over ate when I joined the server too. It was terrible.”

“Oh, yeah?” Tommy said. Slowly the hand began rubbing his back in a gentle motion. “Why the fuck did you do that? Soup eating contests a big tradition here?”

“Oh no unfortunately, no one challenged me to a soup eating contest. I was just so excited about the fact that food could taste good that I overindulged. By a lot. The other hermits kept an eye on my food portions for a while before I worked out how much actually made me full without hurting myself.” Scar said. “Golden apples and carrots are okay but even they get tiring after a while.”

“I don't think I could ever get tired of them.” Tommy mumbled. The pressure on his back was strangely distracting. Oddly tingly too. How long had it been since someone rubbed his back? Something more than a friendly pat or quick hug? He wasn't sure. He remembered Wilbur doing it once, a long time ago.

“You say that now, but trust me, you will.” Scar said with a laugh. He shifted a bit closer, continuing. “They’re one of the only foods you can’t make without a crafting table. I think there’s a few mods to get around that but you can’t make it any other way.”

“I tried once.” Tommy said wistfully. It had been a dumb idea, Tubbo and him had spent ages mining for gold and then stealing carrots from a village. They had nearly burned themselves, melting the gold down and pouring it over the carrots. It had been incredibly disgusting, the carrot weirdly limp and the gold impossible to eat. Nothing like the crisp sweetness of a golden carrot.

“You did?” Scar said, a second hand joining the first. Before Tommy could react, he continued. “I tried to make a stew out of them once. Terrible idea.”

“You gotta be kidding.” Tommy said, with a frown. “Why would you do that? That sounds terrible.”

And a waste of resources. He and Tubbo had gotten a lot of disapproval for their experiment though Tommy staunchly defended it had been worth it. And they had had a lot more resources back then, before war came to the server. But why try to make a stew out of golden carrots? They were already edible.

“I was bored and had gone two days without sleep.” Scar said, chuckling. “Cub, he's a friend of mine that you'll meet later, walked in on me staring at the soup pot and wrestled me to bed. Passed out and was really confused why my golden carrots were gone when I woke up.”

“Did Cub try the soup?” Tommy asked, morbidly curious.

“Gods no. He buried it. Admittedly, there were a lot of problems with it beyond bad carrot choices, mostly that I might have added rotten flesh in thinking the carrots would even it out.” Scar said like that didn’t upgrade the soup from weird to horrifying. “Refused to tell me where it was buried too.”

“Waste of food.” Tommy hummed. He would have eaten it, if only because it was hard getting food in exile. Farming was not his forte and there were no farms around to swipe from to supplement his meals.

Scar’s hands paused. “We have plenty of food.” Scar said. “If it doesn’t taste good, it’s fine to throw it out and get more. There’s always plenty to go around, we make sure of it.”

Tommy hummed, not quite believing him. Swiping from farms had been common on his server and most jealously guarded theirs after wars had destroyed most of the bigger farms. He couldn’t imagine Wilbur or Techno or even Dream letting him pour out a whole pot of stew.

“Do you have any foods you dislike?” Scar said. “Stuff you won’t eat? I hate eating beet stew, it tastes weird and the crafting recipe was so weird I never wanted to make it.”

“Potatoes.” Tommy said, his eyes half lidded. He yawned. Between the repetitive warm motion and the weight in his belly, he really wanted to take a long nap. “Only thing to eat for months because Tech liked farming them and refused to farm anything else. Hate ‘em.”

If he had to eat another potato, he’d be sick. Wilbur had tried making it a little special in the beginning, asking Tommy whether he wanted his raw or baked but eventually, even the jokes were gone after a while. Everyone was tired of potatoes except Techno who had soldiered on making them.

“No potatoes then.” Scar said. Tommy hummed muzzily, not quite paying attention now. A chill had spread from where Scar’s hands had pressed, oddly nice. “We have plenty of other foods anyways, I’m sure we can make sure to feed you other things then potatoes.”

“Don’t bother. I’ll eat ‘em.” Tommy said. Being picky was wasting food and he didn’t want them taking his food away because they got mad at him for being picky. “Isn’t a big deal, I’m just tired of it.”

“It’s a big deal if you don’t like them.” Scar said evenly. “Nobody here makes me eat beet stew. They know I’d be unhappy if I eat it and so no one brings it up. They make other things and eat that disgusting red brew out of my sight.”

Tommy hummed a soft reply, slumping a bit sideways into something cold. Maybe a nap would make this conversation make more sense, he decided. Maybe he was already asleep, imagining this conversation.

“You’re not imagining anything.” Scar said. A warm hand cupped the back of his neck, gently rubbing it. Tommy hummed, relaxing further, his eyes slipping closed. A tinny voice screamed at him, for what, he wasn’t sure.

It was just so comfortable. The blankets warm and soft, the soft touch pulling him deeper and deeper. He didn't understand how this could be bad.

"Who's Tech by the way?" Scar asked, his voice sounding far away. "The one you said was farming all the potatoes."

"My bother." Tommy said. He giggled. That fit well even if it wasn't the word he had been looking for. "Brother. Dunno if that's still true though. He was really mad at me last time I saw him."

"How so? You seem like a real sweet kid."

Tommy giggled at the thought. Sweet. "Told me that if I wanna be a hero, then I gotta die." Tommy said. He snorted at it, blinking blearily. The hand resumed its stroking, lulling him back into darkness. "Silly. Didn't wanna be the hero."

"Not many do. I prefer storytelling myself." Scar said with a hum. "Is Tech his full name?"

"No." Tommy said. He snuggled further into the warmth, yawning. Why did they keep asking him questions? He wanted to sleep, not talk. It was so rude. So not pogchamp. "Doesn't like it when I use his full name."

He wasn't so sure about that anymore. He had thought Techno liked his nicknames, thought they were cool. Tommy had been the first person to call him the Blade because his fighting was so cool. He thought they had liked it, and said it was a cool warrior name. But then Techno snapped at him the last time he said it. So maybe he had been wrong about that.

"I see." Scar said. "Do you know where I can find this Mr. Tech?"

"Dunno. He left." Tommy said. And good riddance. The other had destroyed the city they had built together. There had been nothing of his brother in those mad red eyes, nothing of the Techie who had cradled him gently and braided jewelry into his head. "Sleep now."

A soft chuckle, gentle hands guiding him down. "Alright then. That's about all I think I'll be able to get out of you. You can go to sleep now. We can talk about the city visit when you're awake again."

"Night." Tommy said, letting himself sink into the warmth. With his eyes closed and mind drifting, he could almost pretend that he was home, before the war and chaos. With Wilbur's hand soothingly combing through his hair and humming softly. A full belly and warm blankets. It was nice. Peaceful.

The code was in his dreams again. No more questions. It flickered by at a breakneck pace, only pausing to linger over his stats once or twice. Tommy watched it go by, trying to capture it with his eyes but unable to see what the code was showing.

Why did he keep seeing this? What was the point of it? Was it because of the glitch?

As soon as he thought that, the code stuttered. Slowed. He could see the outlines of red hearts, the data he knew had to contain his individual stats. Tommy stared, frozen at the sight.

Unable to explain, unable to ask.

“You shouldn’t be here.” They whispered. And then his eyes were closing, the code blurring away. A feeling like he was falling. All thoughts of that binary sky slipped away.

When they opened again, it was a real dream. Tubbo weaving flower crowns and Wilbur strumming his guitar, humming the notes to a new song. In the distance, he could see L’Manburg as it was before they took it back. Before it was ruined.

But the sight made him hesitate. Some unexplainable feeling insisted there was something wrong with this, that he had seen something before this. He just needed to remember and he could figure it out.

“Hey, boss man, you coming or what?” Tubbo asked, waving a daisy. Wilbur looked up, his smile warm and gentle. “These flowers aren’t going to weave themselves.”

“Yeah, big man. I’m coming.” Tommy said, stepping forward. The mystery could wait a little while for him to come back to it. It had been so long since he had good dreams. He was going to savor this one.

It was cold when he woke up. Tommy groaned, rolling over, and flailing a bit. “Light’s too bright.” He mumbled. It felt like the ceiling light was trying to sear his eyes out. Rude. Why the hell were the lights so bright?

Blessedly, they dimmed, and Tommy let his head thump back against the pillow. “Can’t even let me sleep alone?” He said, raising a hand. Scar was sitting against the wall, his comm angled to the side as if he had been showing Grian something before the other moved to the light switch. “Figures.”

“Hey, we didn’t watch you sleep. We watched videos.” Scar said, tucking his comm back into his jacket. “It was a really good chance to catch up on some new build stuff. Besides, I figured you’d want us to stick around.”

“And why’s that?” Tommy snapped. He forced himself into a sitting up position, wincing a bit at the spike of pain in his stomach. It was a bit better now that he wasn’t quite so full but he hated the reminder that he was still so weak. Especially in front of these guys.

“You won the contest, didn’t you?” Scar said. He hopped to his feet. “You said you wanted me to show you around my base! I mean, I figured you’d want it as soon as possible but if not, we can reschedule! No time limits on this!”

“No, no, of course I want to see it right away.” Tommy said. He frowned, looking at Grian who was smiling as well. Was this a trap or something? “I just thought you wouldn’t let me for a while.”

It would be really shitty of them to make this a trap. He had won that prize fair and square! But he couldn’t put it past them. Dream had done that once or twice, asking nicely if he

wanted to leave exile. All it got him was a bruised nose and ashy hands. Eventually it had been easy to parrot whatever the other wanted to hear to get them off his back.

“Well, Doc said he’s coming along to make sure you don’t get hurt.” Grian said, moving his hand away from the light switch. “So why wouldn’t we show you around? Trust me, whatever chaos you can commit, we have done far worse.”

“Yeah, Poultry Man would know about that.” Scar said, laughing. Tommy frowned. Poultry man? He had never heard of that Hermit.

Grian laughed. “Yeah! Poultry Man has caused a lot of chaos around here. He definitely knows his way around a prank or two. Maybe you’ll see him around when we give you that tour! That’ll make it more fun!”

“I meant it as a joke.” Scar said with a theatrical groan. He smiled at Tommy. “Do you see what I have to deal with? Trust me, you won’t be as bad as them.”

“That’s what you think. I could totally out prank whatever you’ve done.” Tommy said with a huff. He could totally outdo it, he had been the best at pranks. His reign of terror in the early days had been long and notorious. “But isn’t there like the-” He waved a hand, not sure how to say it. Not wanting to say it.

“The what?” Grian asked, frowning. “I can’t think of anything.”

“The glitch, yeah? Thought you’d remember that. Shouldn’t I be quarantined or whatever till it’s done so I don’t get glitch cooties everywhere?” Tommy said. He wasn’t going to run the risk of him glitching something and them blaming it on him. No way, no how. “Do I need to wear a hazmat suit or something?”

“Oh no, it should be safe. Xisuma told us that the glitch should be very manageable. He’s protected and reinforced most of the code already and most of the stuff that could get disrupted by the glitch were already burned like your clothing, or experimental stuff that you won’t be able to access.” Grian explained. “That man has thought of everything.”

Tommy perked up. “Then what are we waiting for?” He said, pushing the blankets away. “Let’s go!”

He had gotten so tired of this room. The bed was comfortable but it was so so boring. He wanted to move, to run around! Not sit around and chat because apparently these guys panicked over perfectly minor wounds!

“Well, not quite so fast.” Grian said. He shared an uneasy look with Scar. “There is one thing we’re going to talk about. Shouldn’t take us too long! But it’s something you need to know especially because you don’t have your comm right now.”

“Oh yeah?” Tommy said. “Hit me, big man. I can take it.”

What was it now? More rules? Punishments if he broke something? He could deal with it. It’d suck, yeah, but soon he’d be outside. Maybe he could figure out a few just in case of

escape routes or pick up some tools.

“Right now, between the illness you just fought off, the injuries, and the glitch, you’re in kind of a delicate situation.” Scar said, choosing his words carefully. Tommy waved a hand, wondering where the other was going with it. “Enough that it’s affecting your overall health. You only have four hearts.”

“I thought this was infinite respawns?” Tommy said. Was that privilege being taken away already? Because if so, fuck em. He had already lived on one life, he could be a big man. But fuck. Four hearts. That was pretty low. The last time he hit that low was his early 2b2t days and he hated every minute of it.

“Of course it is!” Grian said. “Why wouldn’t it be? You’ve already been added to the whitelist so you’ll get the infinite respawns. But just because you can respawn infinitely doesn’t mean we want you to die over and over again.”

“I’ll be fine.” Tommy said, waving a hand. “I’ve had way lower health before. One time, it got as low as two hearts. Now that was sucky. Four hearts is double that, I got this in the bag.”

“Two hearts? You’re joking.” Grian said. His eyes were wide, wings fluffed. Had he said something wrong? Tommy ran back over his sentence in his head, not sure what was wrong with it. Surely, Grian had low health before. Or maybe it wasn’t impressive because the guy had gone lower?

“Of course not, I don’t joke about that.” Tommy said, puffing out his chest. “It was easy peasy, ya know? Hardest part was keeping my resources because I was on an anarchy server and those dudes are so annoying. Like meh meh meh all the time.”

Grian and Scar shared another one of those looks. “Be that as it may, even if you have experience with this, we still want you to stay close and listen.” Scar said. “We have a lot of traps around because of people experimenting with redstone or pranking others and we don’t want you stumbling in one. You need to stick with one of us at all times.”

“Fine.” Tommy said. He’d agree to it if it got him out of his room. Besides, just because he agreed didn’t mean he couldn’t try slipping away and maybe exploring a bit on his own. He pushed himself to his feet, wincing a bit at the soreness and vertigo.

“Easy. You’ve been taking it slow for a while so give yourself some slack.” Grian advised.

“I feel fine.” Tommy insisted, taking a few slow steps. His muscles pulled but he didn’t fall. When he didn’t fall flat on his face, he grew bolder, striding forward. “See? Ready to go big man.”

“You might want these first, I reckon.” Scar said with a wry grin. Tommy glanced down at his outstretched hand. What could the other mean? Oh. He was holding out sandals. Yeah, that might be a bit helpful.

“I knew that.” Tommy said instantly, reaching out and accepting them. They were better than he expected with thick soles and a colorful red and white braid design. “Did you make these too?”

“Xisuma coded them in when we started planning for you to go out.” Grian said with a shrug. “Some of us dabble in crafting but shoes? Usually we code them in or buy them off server. They’re a massive pain to make.”

“Thanks then, I guess.” Tommy said begrudgingly. Some part of him itched at accepting the shoes so easily but he really did need a way to get around. Otherwise, he’d fail at running away for something as pathetic as stubbing his toe on a cactus. And he could not let his reputation be damaged like that.

They were comfortable, but he found himself missing his sneakers, worn and so broken in that they perfectly fit. “We can talk to Xisuma about having you pick out a few different kinds of shoes.” Grian said, catching his frown.

“Nah man, it’s fine.” Tommy said, glancing back up. He had a few pairs in his house, he was pretty sure, and he doubted someone would steal them. As soon as he got back, he’d swing by and grab a pair. Maybe if his sewing supplies hadn’t been messed with, he could sew himself a new shirt. “This should be good, I’m not exactly staying for very long so I don’t need more, big man.”

Grian hesitated, sending Scar an odd look. Tommy frowned, looking between them. Was he being left out of some kind of conversation again? “Well, mate-”

“I think you should.” Scar said with an odd smile, nudging Grian’s shoulder. “After all, it’s going to be a while before Xisuma fixes the glitch and I’m sure the other Hermits will like showing you around. We live all over the place so you’re going to need more pairs for each biome! And clothes, because who wants to stay in one pair all the time?”

Tommy hesitated. “This isn’t some kind of trick?” He demanded, looking between them. The scammer in him screamed to take the deal, strip them of everything they were worth. “Because I’m not paying for any of this.”

“You’ll be paying us back by making sure you don’t smell.” Grian said with a snort. “Trust me, I get enough of that when I have to drag Mumbo away from a days long redstone project.”

“Fine.” Tommy said, folding his arms. Fuck it, wouldn’t be the first time he stole a bunch of stuff from a bunch of rich fuckers.

It was odd though. The last time he had picked out clothes had been years ago, back when Wilbur first brought him in. Before, he was always in armor or the suit from Business Bay. It had been odd going from that to having to pick from a massive selection of clothes. His first shirt had been red and white and even years later, he still wore those colors. Even then, he had sewn most of his newer stuff by himself.

“Great!” Grian said, his smile returning. “We can talk to him after your tour. I think he’s planning to do more code work while you’re out. We just need to pick up Doc and we’ll be ready to go.”

“Finally.” Tommy said, grinning as he saw the door open. It felt great to be finally getting out of this room. It felt like he had been in there for way too long and he was ready to finally take a look around this place.

He followed Grian out, glancing around. Gods, how much time did these people have? The hallway had all kinds of intricate decorations like oak log pillars and lanterns that spilled warm light across the walls. The ceiling arched instead of being flat. Even the plank floors had been carefully polished.

Tommy felt a strange spark of envy. None of this stuff was necessary for the hallway. Magic meant that pillars weren’t really necessary, and torches were far cheaper to craft. If this was how their fucking hallways looked, Scar’s base was going to be incredible.

“Anything wrong?” Grian asked, looking back. Tommy glanced up, quickly shaking his head.

“All fine, big man. Just thinking about how crazy you fuckers are.” Tommy said. You could build a new chestplate with the amount of lanterns here. That got him a soft chuckle from Scar. “Why even have half this stuff?”

“We like how it looks.” Scar said as if that explained everything. “Don’t you have stuff you like just because you think it looks nice? And use it to build.”

“Cobblestone.” Tommy said confidently. “Best block ever.”

Grian perked up. “Yeah, birdie! I’ve used cobblestone before, it makes a great addition to stone palettes-”

“Just cobblestone. It’s the best block ever, it doesn’t need any other stones trying to ruin how perfect it looks.” Tommy said, holding direct eye contact. Grian stood still for a moment, glancing at Scar for support.

“You know, I think cobblestone is a wonderful block.” Scar said. Tommy flinched as he waved a hand but the other was only waving him on. “But we do need to pick up the pace or Doc will get worried. We can talk about cobblestone after making sure he doesn’t think you’ve keeled over in the hallway.”

Tommy frowned, quickly following behind them. As he walked, he noted that there were no other rooms in the hallway other than a small kitchen alcove halfway down. Scar led them down a flight of stairs that opened into a small main entrance, just as opulent as the hallway. And just as empty. The only person was Doc, leaning on the wall next to what had to be the main door.

Did no one else use this building? But that couldn’t be right, why build an entire building for a sick kid? To quarantine the glitch?

Before he could ask, Grian turned, smiling at him. “And now I think it’s time we taught you to use Elytra.”

“What the fuck is an Elytra.”

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact, I headcanon Vex hybrids like Scar having a lot of abilities. Cold magic, flight, putting people to sleep... Interesting, no?

I cut this chapter here because it was getting huge, but the next part is gonna be super fun. I'm very excited.

The Feeling of Flying

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Panic attack

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“What the fuck is this.” Tommy said, noise wrinkling as Grian tried to press some bizarre contraption in his hands. “Y’all got some modded creatures or something or is this some kind of prank on the new guy?”

He stared at them, kind of grossed out by how they look like beetle wings. They were a dark violent, glimmering with enchantments that made the thin membranes glow. So translucent he could see the shadows of Grian’s hands through the odd material. There were some odd straps towards the top forming a rough harness.

Grian frowned. “Have you never seen an elytra before?” He said, sharing a look with Doc and Scar. Tommy bristled at it, the reminder that he was the odd man out. “They’re pretty common.”

“Yeah, I’ve never fucking heard of them. Was I supposed to?” Tommy snapped, shoving his hands in his pockets. There wasn’t anything like that on the Dream SMP, Hypixel when he was there, hell, he couldn’t remember anything from 2b2t either. And 2b2t was all about the rare loot.

“Language. They were discovered a few years back, mate, in End ships. They’re pretty common on most servers.” Grian said. Yeah, like that was supposed to mean anything to him? “Every Hermit has one.”

“Hypixel doesn’t have them, I think.” Scar said because he wasn’t a massive bitch. “Flying isn’t allowed and there would be too much coding to make them work outside of a few minigames.”

“If they were discovered a few years ago, I would never have seen them then.” Tommy said with a shrug. 2b2t and SMP Earth had been a while back. “Going to the End isn’t allowed on my server so yeah, fuck off with that common shit.”

Did he think that was bullshit? Absolutely. Was he going to test that? Maybe someday. He had heard it was pretty cool, all black void and dragons and shit. Sounded like a pretty pogchamp place to visit. But there had always been more things to do than pushing back on that one rule so Tommy left it. Not like he had ever even been to the End before.

He wasn’t quite sure how you got to the End. And there were ships there? Why did people need ships there? And what the fuck was an elytra?

He was so deep in thought that he missed their concerned looks, the way Grian's hands tightened on the elytra until the knuckles went white.

Doc sighed, pushing himself off the wall and interrupting Grian's next question. "They're artificial gliders." He said. "Do you have tridents?"

"Of course we do, big man? You're looking at one of the best." Tommy said, puffing his chest out. Having a riptide trident was the best way to get around and he was one of the best at flying. Leaping up, water droplets falling around him and the wind in his hair, he could pretend that he was flying.

Even with how shitty of a friend Dream had been, that party was nice.

"These are about the same. Hop off a high palace with them open and they'll let you glide like a riptide trident would, just more similar to an avian's glide." Doc said, nodding at Grian's wings. Tommy followed his gaze, tilting his head to the side. "We use them to get around."

Tommy hunches in on himself, rolling his eyes. "And?" He said, cringing a bit at the shininess of the word.

It just felt so weird. To be standing here as they stared at him. Did they think he was stupid? Or pathetic? For not knowing what these stupid elytra were that were apparently so important? Because if so, fuck em. He didn't need this in his life.

"I don't need that." He continued, taking a step back. It was probably rare and stupid expensive. It was one thing to accept clothes, but this, this was something big, a debt. "I'll just walk."

"But walking is going to take forever!" Grian said, his wings fluttering. "It'll be easier for me to just teach you now."

"You should let him, he'll get sad if you don't. Avian instincts and all." Scar said. He ducked under a fumbled swat from Grian. "Hey, no need for that! I'm helping you out here!"

And damn it, that makes him hesitate. Because after living with hybrids, he knows how painful it is when their instincts go unanswered. They get twitchy, strained, their instincts constantly screaming at them. And yeah, Grian is a bitch, but Tommy's not that terrible, he hopes.

Grian pounces on that hesitation, beginning to tug the elytra away. "It's fine if you don't want to." Grian said, wings drooping. Tommy cringes a bit at that. "We can boat part of the way there and walk the rest. No need for elytra."

"Fuck you, I can do it." Tommy said, because pretending Grian challenged him is better than admitting he's a wimp who feels bad. He snags the edge of the elytra, easily tugging it out of Grian's grip.

It feels even more delicate in his hands, as light as a feather, as thin as a few pieces of paper. For a minute, Tommy stands there, staring at it. Half expecting it to shatter, for the glow to fade away when faced with his festering shadows. Terrifyingly fragile.

“The straps go around your shoulders.” Doc said, carefully grabbing his hands. Tommy bares his teeth, flaring up at him. Doc releases his hands immediately, and Tommy tries to ignore the small ache. “Just trying to ground you, spitfire, you were zoning out there.”

“I was fine.” Tommy said sullenly, ignoring the nickname. He fumbles with the straps but they don’t seem to work quite right. He can get one arm in but then he can’t get his arm into the other side or it’s so tight it’s cutting off his circulation. He made a frustrated grumble, peeking up at the others. Scar and Doc already have theirs on, effortlessly easy.

He fights with it but no matter how hard he tugs, it doesn’t work. He ignored the sting in his eyes, glaring at the elytra. Was this some kind of joke? How the fuck were you supposed to put it on?

“Tommy? Are you okay?” Scar said, glancing up from his comm. He tucked it away in his pocket and Tommy glared back down at the elytra.

“Peachy.” Tommy growled. He glared at the elytra, struggling with it for a few minutes more before his shoulders finally slump in defeat. “How the fuck do you wear this?”

“I can help.” Doc said. Tommy flinches back but Doc doesn’t swat, does not hit, instead they carefully tug the elytra out of his hands, adjusting the buckles with quick movements. “The straps are a pain to learn the first time”

“Why didn't you warn me the?” Tommy snaps. Had they wanted to see him embarrass himself struggling with it?

“I didn’t think you would want me to help with it at first.” Doc said with an easy shrug. Tommy watched him suspiciously, not quite trusting his words. Man was weirdchamp, cool, but weirdchamp. He finished whatever, he was doing, holding the elytra out. “Try this.”

Tommy tries to tug it away, scowling when Doc’s grip tightens. “Let go, big man.” He said. “I can put it on myself.”

“I know that, I just want to adjust the straps as you did. I had to roughly guess at a few of them.” Doc explains. Tommy rolls his eyes, carefully slipping his arms into the straps and trying not to flinch as warm hands ghost over his shoulders. There’s no sparks of pain, no punishment, but the fear of it is still there and it makes his stomach curdle. If he had to compare it to something, it would be kind of like Philza’s fond shoulder pats before he joined the Dream SMP. Calm. Reassuring. Absolutely terrifying because he knew that those could change on a moment’s notice, Dream had done similar things before.

Before he can snap at them, Doc’s hands move away. “That should be good now.” He said. No acknowledgement of it, just easy casual touch and it was gone again. This was why Tommy said the guy was weirdchamp.

“They look good on you.” Grian said, wings fluttering with quick happy movements. Tommy glanced back, rolling his shoulders and feeling the weight on them. They weren’t as heavy as he expected, just a bit lighter than iron armor, even if outer tips reached his knees.

“Of course they look good on me, I make everything look good.” Tommy said. Grian just smiled wider, wings flicking. “So, like, what’s next?”

“Usually with elytra you use fireworks to take off and keep going.” Scar explained. He frowned at Grian’s indignant look. “You don’t use elytra, he needs somebody who actually wears them.”

“I know the theory!”

“That’s right. The theory of it! You’re going to send him headfirst into a window!” Tommy flinched as a hand came down on his shoulder, meeting Doc’s eyes.

“Leave them to their argument.” He grumbled. Tommy scowled but let the other pull him away with a minimum of fussing. He just wanted to go exploring and now he was stuck in this courtyard. Even if the thought of getting flight lessons made his stomach feel all fizzy. Still. “Here.”

Tommy flinched as a stack of fireworks were shoved into his hands, instantly shoving them into his inventory. Who even needed that many fireworks? Did Doc plan to shoot up a whole town or something? “The fuck?”

“Language.” Doc said, holding one firework in his hands. “These light with a flick of the wrist so they’re easy to use, just always keep one in your non-dominant hand. You’re going to need to crouch, and then flick your wrist like this-”

And Tommy falls back as his world shatters into bright colors and noise, so much noise, the booming crackle of an explosion. He scrambles back away from it, his heart beating so loud he’s surprised he can even hear the explosion at all- no ignore that he needed to get away from here, needing to get away it wasn’t safe-

Explosions always meant bad things. They meant gunpowder filling the air, death of people he loved. Burns up his arms and put your things in the hole Tommy why do you keep being back Tommy.

Arms wrap around him and Tommy screams, a pitiful wheezy sound, his lungs desperately trying to draw in more air and failing. He flails in their hold, desperately trying to call away.

“Tommy, tommy, you’re okay.” Someone whispers in his ear. Tommy makes a high shrill sound, eyes wide and unseeing. “In on four, hold for four, out for four, come on birdie, you can do this. I know you can.”

It takes an embarrassingly long time for him to hear and longer before he slowly begins to match the instructions, his chest aching with the amount of effort. When his eyes finally focus, he can see Doc’s and Scar’s worried faces.

“Are you okay?” Scar asked, one hand still resting on Tommy’s arm. He pulls away when he sees Tommy looking at it and Tommy has to bite down on the urge to tell him to put it back, craving the grounding feeling. “Back on the ground with us?”

“Peachy.” Tommy said, his voice trembling a bit. He squirms in Grian’s hold, trying to move away and the other gets the clue, immediately letting go. He forces himself back to his feet, avoiding their eyes.

Prime, this was embarrassing. Having a tantrum in front of these guys? So not cool. Tommy shoved his hands in inventory, grimacing at the fireworks. He could do this. He had to do this. The great Tommyinnit wasn’t afraid of anything and he definitely wasn’t afraid of fireworks. Fireworks were afraid of him! “Just uh, just got to light this, right?”

The fireworks were pulled out of his hand as soon as they appeared, Doc holding them in his hands. “That won’t be necessary.” He said. Tommy bristled at the words.

“What the fuck man? No! I’m fine! I’m not letting you lock me up again, I earned this fair and square!” Tommy said, trying to grab the fireworks back. Too late, the flicker of light appeared, and they were gone. He growled, frustrated and panicked alike.

“Hey, nobody’s stopping you for leaving!” Scar said. He grinned when Tommy looked back up at him, adjusting his hat. “But kid, you just had a panic attack from Doc lighting a firework. Are you okay?”

“Peachy.” Tommy snaps. He notices his hands are shaking and clasps them together, trying and failing to make them stop.

“I’m starting to think you don’t know what the word means.” Grian jokes, standing up. Tommy whips around, glaring at him, daring the other to poke at his weak spot. If anything, it just makes Grian’s face twist a bit before he continues. “That wasn’t a normal reaction. We want to know if you’re okay.”

“I’m fine.” Tommy said, scowling. “You guys are the fucking dumbasses, do you know how much damage those could do?”

“Damage?” Grian echoes. He glances at Scar, and Tommy feels his hackles rise at the look that flashes on his face. Pity. That dark look melts into something soft and emotional and pitying, oh look at poor babyish Tommy who can’t even handle one explosion. He glares at the ground, ignoring the way his eyes burn.

A soft sigh, a gentle hand presses underneath his chin and Tommy is too surprised to resist as his head gets tilted back up so he’s looking in Scar’s eyes. “The fireworks are duds.” He said. “There’s crafting magic and everything. Enough gunpowder to launch but not enough to do much more than that. The worst thing that happens is a few minor burns if you let off one too close to you on the ground. And almost no one uses them to fight. They’re harmless, kid. And if anyone tries to hurt you with one or you hurt yourself, you can come and get a healing potion and we’ll give them a good scolding.”

“That’s not how that works.” Tommy mumbles, but it’s less heated now. There’s something determined in Scar’s eyes, something he doesn’t quite know how to respond to.

There was no such thing as dud fireworks on the Dream SMP. Instead, fireworks had become something of an arms race, pursuing the perfect balance to cause the most damage without it backfiring into their face. Reloading was slower than an ax swing but it could pack a lot of damage and so crossbows had become common.

Tommy had never really been a big fan. Didn’t think he could ever be, not when the smell of gunpowder was accompanied with cold red eyes, a yellow box, and Tubbo’s desperate pleading.

So, it was weird to see the determination in Scar’s eyes when he talked about them as being rarely used. That people could get punished if they shot him. Because in the Dream SMP, you didn’t get punished for using fireworks on other players, especially if they were him. It was normal.

The hermits definitely weren’t normal.

Apparently Scar could see some of that confusion in his eyes because the look somehow got even softer like when Philza saw a baby bird just out of the nest. “You definitely don’t have to use fireworks either if you’re uncomfortable. And it’s not because they don’t want you flying, they do. It’s because it’s not safe if you were to have a panic attack in midair. Trust me, crashes aren’t fun.”

The hand slips away before he can bite it, ruffling his hair so quickly that Tommy almost missed it. When he looks up, he’s met with Scar’s cocky grin.

Grian laughed, breaking the tenseness of the scene. “And Scar would know that with how often he crashes.” He said. The pity still lingers but there’s no mocking towards him and Tommy looks back down at the ground, not quite sure how to handle it.

They start bickering then and Tommy is relieved how quickly the attention falls off at him. As much as he hates it, hates the quiet and loneliness that comes with it, no one seems to noticed when he goes quiet. When he’s not right up in their faces, demanding their attention, attention he deserves.

It’s why he’s so surprised when Doc’s hand falls on his shoulder and he glances up into the creeper’s eyes. “I should apologize.” They said, their voice a soft rumble. “I should have asked first if you were comfortable with fireworks instead of assuming. I’m sorry.”

Tommy blinks at them, taken off guard. “Thanks?” He said. He frowns. “Wait, why are you apologizing, big man? It’s no big deal.”

“You had a panic attack. That is a big deal.” Doc said as if his words made sense. As if they didn’t go against what Tommy knew. You didn’t apologize for making people panic, that was their fault. He should have been a big man and not panicked over a tiny explosion. “I know your experiences tell you that it may not matter but it does matter. It matters to us. We want you to be happy and panic attacks or forcing yourself not to panic isn’t part of that.”

Tommy's hands nervously twists, fiddling with the hem of his shirt. "I can handle it." He said, but the words are weak and he winces, repeats them with more force this time. "I can handle it. I'm not a baby. Give them back to me."

"No, I won't. You will not be receiving any more fireworks until Xisuma and another clears that you're ready for it." Doc's voice is hard, his eyes dark. "If you try and take them, I'm ending this tour right now and you will go back to your room until I can trust that you'll be safe about this."

"You can't fucking do this!" Tommy said, his voice rising. It catches the attention of the other two, but they don't move and he knows it's because they agree with Doc. "I can fuck around with fireworks if I want!"

"You're on four hearts. Even with infinite respawns, crashing can hurt. You'll stress your wounds further and you risk permanently crippling yourself." Doc said. "I'm not saying this because I want to, I'm saying this to protect you. And if you can't accept that, then this tour is over because I can't trust that you'll be safe."

Tommy glares at him, baring his teeth, but Doc doesn't back down. For a moment he entertains the idea of pushing it, bolting away or maybe lunging at the other. But Doc looks like he eats mobs for breakfast and he doubts he'll make it far, even a champion runner like himself. Not when Grian can so easily swoop down on him, because from past experiences, flying hybrids are hard to escape.

Maybe they'll give up on him, realize it's too much of a pain and toss him away. Or kill him. He's strong but against an entire server like the Hermits? Fuck, he wanted his hack clients back yesterday. Because the worst part of it, no matter how much he chafes at the threat, is how Doc insists it's for his own good. How much they seem to care about something as small as him having to respawn or panicking a little bit. It makes his stomach churn in an oddly guilty way.

But it hurts to back down, his scowl never leaving. He wants to fight but he wants freedom even more. Wants to go home and that means playing along at least a little bit. "Fine." He snaps. "Then what the fuck am I doing then?"

If Doc noticed his biting tone, he didn't comment on it, his darker look getting darker before lightening again. "That is up for debate. You could pillar up and jump off I suppose."

Tommy shuddered a bit, shaking off the feeling quickly. He was not afraid of going up pillars! He wasn't. He could totally do that.

"That won't be necessary!" Grian intervened before he could speak, his smile so innocent that Tommy's guard instantly went up. "My wings are strong, I can help Tommy take off and keep momentum. It won't be difficult at all, he's pretty light."

"Hey!" Tommy said, puffing up. "I'm a big man."

"Of course you are." Grian said in the polite tone of someone who was lying. "But you're not very heavy, mate, I should be able to take your weight and mind, especially if we're gliding

most of the time. It's common to do it in avian families."

Scar started wheezing in laughter, shaking his head. "Really, Grian?" He said. He waved off Tommy's suspicious look. "I've been asking for a tow for years and he gets one immediately?"

"You're too heavy." Grian said with a whine. "Well? Can I?"

"If he agrees, I see no problem with it." Doc said, his hands slipping inside of his pockets. Tommy glared at him before glancing away. That dude was a wrongun.

"Fine." He said with a grumble. Grian beamed and Tommy rolled his eyes, kind of surprised how excited the other was getting about a simple tow. Surely, it shouldn't need that big of a smile, right?

Eh, whatever. Who knows, maybe the guy is just really excitable all the time.

Grian reached out a hand and Tommy slowly took it, the strange tingly feeling spreading across his hand when the warmth of Grian's palm met it. "You're going to need to hold on tight." Grian said. "The elytra will help you if you fall, but if you let go too early, you could fly straight into a wall. I'll try my best to prevent that from happening though."

He bumped Tommy's shoulder and Tommy glanced up, into those wide dark eyes. "Trust me, birdie, I won't let you fall."

"I'm not scared." Tommy said, feeling that familiar warmth steal across his face. In fact, he was kind of excited. When was the last time he went flying? When Wilbur was still an admin, willing to carry him around while they worked in creative mode? Or was it one of Philza's rare flights, arms wrapped around him?

He held on tight, waiting for Grian to make the first move. The other beamed at him, wings flaring out to the sides before pushing down in one sudden movement.

Tommy yelped as his arm nearly got ripped out of its socket, feeling himself get dragged up. If it wasn't for Grian's tight grip, he might have let go completely. He didn't think anything had broke but it certainly stung.

Craning his head down, he watched how the world below got smaller and smaller, Soc and Scar watching them go. Fifty feet, one hundred feet, high enough that he could see over the trees in the forest biome, that's what they had been in, to distant biomes.

"Hey, Toms!" Grian yelled over the wind. "I'm going to start gliding now! Tilt yourself forward, the wings will do the rest of the work!"

That sounded like bullshit if he had ever heard it. But whatever. Tommy twisted, an awkward movement with the wind rushing around him, his hold on Grian's hand straining as he tried to get the wings to work. He spun, body settling into a vaguely horizontal position-

With a soft whispering sound, barely audible over the wind, the elytra flared open, catching the wind and riding it. Tommy's eyes widened as he felt himself glide forward, clumsily, *but*

he was flying.

Fucking nether, no wonder Dream didn't let them have elytra, Tommy thought, his cheeks hurting with how wide he was smiling. His stomach felt oddly bubbling, excitement and exhilaration all in one as he soared through the sky. He knew everyone would have fucked off and gone flying rather than listen to his bullshit. This was incredible, amazing, absolutely pogchamp.

He could see everything. In the distance, there were what had to be mountains, too big to be houses. Forests flew by underneath them, only serving as a reminder for how high they were. He was on top of the world!

"This is fucking amazing!" He yelled through the wind, getting a burst of laughter from Grian.

"I know! One of the best feelings ever!" Grian yelled back. "Hey, look down! We're about to hit the jungle! You'll be able to see Scar's base, it'll look like a village!"

Tommy made a quizzical sound, glancing back down. Jungle, yes, he watched as trees whirled by, all smeared and green from how high up they were. Nothing else even vaguely village like. But he didn't see a village.

Until, suddenly he did.

"HE FUCKING BUILT THAT?"

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact! It's common in Avian families for older Avians to help younger Avians take off. It's a bonding gesture and typically something done between close family members. Grian has helped out all the other Hermits at least once.

Of Magical Villages and Exploration

Chapter Notes

Because Hermitcraft builds are crazy even without coming from a server that has been ravaged by war and is currently in a permanent arms race.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

That wasn't a fucking town. It looked like something straight out of a fucking fantasy book set, the kind Philza would read on the long nights inside. What the absolute fuck. He was pretty sure the only reason he stayed in the air was because the elytra were made for gliding because seriously what the fuck.

There was a path. An honest to prime path that looked overgrown in a way that screamed carefully tending. Little mushroom trees that looked bouncy in the best way. There was some kind of glass, or maybe it was a fountain, he couldn't see much from this high up but the sun glinting off something.

And the houses. Intricate little cottages with fancy fucking roofs. Whoever needed more than one house, he thought with just a little bit of hysteria. Why??

Grian tugged on his hand, pulling him into a gentle glide downwards. This close, he could see even more details.

Like this fucking madman rebuilt the trees. They were absolute behemoths, long and sprawling, and so leafy that he couldn't even see the branches. Wooden bridges crossed between them, offering an inviting landing spot. It was all fucking instance.

He had thought it would be fucking like, a slightly cooler village build. Maybe with some more cobblestone on it. Maybe like the community center or church prime because those were the best they had on their server.

Prime, he had thought his house was okay. Not Logsteadshire, that place was a nightmare, but the little hill he had carved out and made into his own. It was a little ramshackle and dirty maybe, but it was warm and cozy.

Their house from before Dream SMP was a bit nice as well but that was in a normal way, know that it had a porch and walls that matched instead of being piecemeal. It didn't even match up to this.

And maybe it was crazy because he knew the Hermits had done some cool stuff. He had heard the stories. He had watched all of Mumbo's videos as they slowly trickled out into the multiserver chat. That man did cool stuff, stuff with machines that he could barely believe.

And there had been the occasional snapshot from other videos, tutorials on using newly discovered blocks for building.

But those had been creative mode. Where the magic of the world was at your fingertips, where your inventory never ran dry, and everything could be summoned in a snap. Hypixel had had some cool stuff as well but that was also creative mode, and teams besides.

2b2t had creative modes and hacks but most people didn't build anything beautiful. They built threats instead, massive craters or blood soaked shrines. Even then, building meant effort, effort most people didn't care about when a stray wither or someone with a grudge and a stack of tnt could wipe out everything.

You didn't do that in Survival mode. Fuck, the paths alone must have meant hours of mining, not to mention the hours of carefully placing each and every block. Hours of carefully snipping away at trees to get leaves, and coaxing them to grow into bushes. Hours of frustrating, backbreaking work just to get a nice path.

He loved the Prime Path. Had put his heart and soul into building it, laying out the wood while joking around with friends. But even he had to admit it had been a lot of work and he was just chopping oak and laying it down. There weren't any fancy patterns or bushes or little lantern posts. Just him and his splinter filled hands and the occasional help of the others.

And yeah, the building he had been in had been nice but he kinda thought that was the Community House of this server. Something everyone had built so it came out a bit weird but nice. But this? This took work.

And that didn't even count the houses.

One creeper explosion and it was gone. One explosion and the entire thing was pointless. One explosion and there would be hours of having to fix what was gone.

Fuck, the wars alone would ravage this place. There weren't any walls, let alone defenses. What was even the point? Other players could ruin it so easily.

(He almost didn't want to and, frightened that he could destroy it just by being here. That with a stumble, a joke gone too far, wood would burn and they'd turn their backs on him without a second thought. He had had seen it happen far too many times before.)

"Pull up a bit?" Grian yelled, jolting him out of his thoughts. "You're going to want to land at an angle so you'll stay on your feet!"

Clumsily, he follows his directions. It didn't have any of the practiced ease of Grian's movements, flaring his wings before landing on the ground with barely a stumble, easily putting a hand out to keep him upright. Tommy leaned against it for a moment before quickly righting himself and taking a step back.

"Always a bit of a rush." Grian chirped and it was weird hearing his voice without the wind tearing it to shreds. "Next time we go flying, I'll teach you a few tricks!"

“I’ll hold you to that, big man.” Tommy said, grinning widely. Flight tricks sounded cool. Tubbo would never believe him if he said Grian had taught him tricks with an elytra. Fuck, Tubs probably wouldn’t even believe elytra were real and not some modded add on.

“You’re going to need to wait for that, I’ve seen the kind of tricks you do.” Doc said. Tommy stiffened but the creeper hybrid didn’t issue any wrong in proclamations, carefully adjusting the elytra over their shoulders. “I’d rather not have him back in the hospital bed because he loop de looped into a tree.”

“You can loop de loop?”

“I would never!” Grian said, squeezing Tommy’s hand. Because that was something they were still doing. He squinted down at it, not quite sure why Grian hadn’t let go yet. “Little bird is safe with me!”

“Gria-“

“Hush both of you.” Scar snapped at Doc and Grian. He adjusted his hat, turning to Tommy, and wow it felt weird being the focus of that smile again. There wasn’t any fear or annoyance, just excitement. “This is my village tour! My moment! And you’re stealing it!”

“Yeah, about that.” Tommy drawled. He gestured around them with his free hand. “What the fuck is this?”

Scar glances around like he has no clue what Tommy is saying. “Language.” He says absently. “What do you mean? It’s a village. A magical village.”

Tommy stares at him, wondering if all the Hermits were this weird or they were having him on. “And you built this?” He said, the doubt in his voice was so thick you could cut through it. “In survival?”

“How else would I have built it?” Scar said, tilting his head to the side. “It’s a survival server, Xisuma doesn’t allow creative mode outside of very specific situations. It’s not like it’s a hard build.”

“Hard build?” Tommy goggles at him. What the fuck did he mean by that? “How is it not a hard build? This is literally hours of work! The stone alone had to take days and trust me when I say I know stone. How can you look at this and say it’s not a hard build?”

“I mean, it’s a bit small?” Scar said, doubtfully, glancing at Doc and Grian for support. But even they looked confused by what Tommy was saying, not that he knew why. “I mean, the trees were definitely a pain to build even if they turned out fantastic, but it took less time than my mega base and I know a lot of the Hermits have built bigger towns.”

How. How could you build a bigger town like this? More complicated than this?

“It’s not even my mega base.” Scar continued like he wasn’t blowing Tommy’s mind. “I would have taken you there but Doc was concerned about the fall hazards and the village is better lit right now anyways. I’ll take you there when your health has healed more.”

Tommy stares at him, absolutely at a loss for words. And it took a lot for big man Tommy to lose his words. A mega base. Something bigger than this, in Survival mode. Probably just as intricate because there was a theme to the fancy but useless accents he had seen before. But bigger.

Why?

He was pulled out of his thoughts by Grian gently squeezing his hand, looking into dark eyes. "You alright, mate?"

"What's the point?" Tommy said, chewing his bottom lip in thought. "It's hours of work for one of these houses alone so why do it? Why rebuild trees and dig paths and all of this?"

"Because I like how it looks." Scar said, his voice soft like he was coaxing a wounded animal. "Because I like sketching my ideas and watching them take shape and then seeing it when it's done. I always wanted my own little magical village and this is it. Same with my other builds. I wanted to build them, I could build them, so I did build them."

"They could get destroyed so easily."

The last time he had seen someone build a place they love, an idea of their own tended over the years, a symphony... It had ended in ashes and the creator standing amongst them with bloodlust in his eyes.

"No one would do that." Doc said, his rumbling voice quiet. "Not unless Scar allowed it. We don't destroy other people's builds or things they care about. If you do, that means you help them rebuild it."

"Or unless it's funny but ultimately not too bad." Grian volunteered. "I steal people's doors. A bit annoying for some people but everyone takes it as the prank it is. But I don't like, tnt people's bases. That would be bad."

Tommy scrunched his face up in thought, glancing between them and the village. "And people just listen to that?" He said. Why would they? What stopped anyone from doing it?

"We're a family here and we trust each other." Scar said with a shrug. "Sort of an honor amongst friends rule and we have people like Xisuma and Joe and Cleo who help out when things go too far or... untrustworthy people end up on the server."

"Like me." Tommy said.

Grian snorted. "Definitely not like you." He said. "Trust me, you would know if we didn't trust you."

Tommy wasn't quite sure if he believed that. Lots of people hadn't trusted him but acted nice to his face. Grian was nice but some part of him was always waiting for Dream to come out and yell at him for failing a test. Ruining everything.

Slowly, he tugged his hand away, trying not to feel a pang of guilt at Grian's clear reluctance even as he pulled away. It didn't matter if the other felt guilty, he reminded himself, big man

Tommy didn't need anyone to hold his hand like he was a baby.

"Enough of this!" Scar said, clapping his hands together. "I think it's time that I give you a tour of my magical little village! I'm very excited for this, I love showing people around. This has been one of my favorite builds of the season."

"You have more?" Tommy said, throwing his hands up. "Are you fucking insane? How do you even have the patience for most of this?"

"Building isn't that much about patience." Scar said. He considered his words for a minute before shaking his head. "Scratch that, it kind is. But really, between my tools and beacons, the actual mining part goes by pretty fast! And then I just have to lay everything out!"

"Are you trying to make this shit sound normal? Because you're making it sound worse." Tommy said. That got him a soft chuckle from Doc. "Right, so, you're all crazy is what I'm putting together here."

"Ah, but crazy and having a magical village." Scar said, wagging a finger. "And some builds go unfinished anyways like Grian still hasn't finished the back of his mansion."

Grian squawked, swatting at Scar. "I don't want to talk about that." He said, his face tinged red with embarrassment. "That's not up for discussion! We're talking about you right now, not about me!"

"You have a mansion?" Tommy said. A few weeks ago, he would have thought of something like the size of the community house, maybe more impressive and with some diamonds because Grian was cool like that. But looking around at the village, it could very well likely be huge. "Fuck, I'd love to see that."

"You will!" Grian said, bouncing up and down with excitement. "It's still very cool! You could even stay there with me! I have plenty of rooms or we could share! Like a sleepover every night!"

Scar said something but Tommy didn't hear it, staring at Grian in shock and confusion. It was one thing to have the other babysit him when he had first arrived and during this tour. But to offer him his house, Why? What was even the point of that? He didn't exactly have any money and if the fucker wanted a servant, he'd clobber him.

"I don't think that'll matter much, I won't be staying long enough to need a house." Tommy said eventually, turning away. If he couldn't live in the hospital, community building, whatever that place was, he could just carve out a hillside later like he did before. Easy, fast, and he could just fill it in with dirt before he went. He turned away, missing Grian's sudden frustrated frown and dark eyes, the aborted grab for his shoulder. "Take me around the village, big man!"

"Of course, of course!" Scar said, waving a hand. He set off at a fast walk down the path. "Over here is the main house I tend to use when I sleep over here. It's nice and cozy and I can show you the inside of it in a bit! Not that I sleep much but it's nice having a place to rest your weary head."

“I never really slept much on my server either.” Tommy said with a shrug. This last... how long had it been already? Was the longest he had slept in months most likely. Usually he just tapped a bed to set his spawn and relied on server magic to keep him going without. Sleeping was a vulnerability to be exploited and the only ones who did it regularly anymore were Fundy and George who were either good at hiding away or who had allies who’d defend them.

He had tried to get back into the habit with exile, thinking maybe he was far enough away that catching a few winks would be safe. That had ended quickly. The nightmares and ocean awakenings meant he usually only caught a few hours a night and honestly, not very restful. Big man Tommy had better things to do than lie in some bed anyways.

“You must have been a phantom magnet.” Scar said. He caught Tommy’s confused look. “Phantoms spawn at night when players go too long without sleeping. They’re not a huge problem because Xisuma set up a mechanism where only one person has to sleep to change the day and night cycle so Bdubs or someone else usually changes it back to daytime and the phantoms die. Sometimes people don’t sleep though or the cycle has been set as normal which is when they become big problems.”

Tommy eyed him suspiciously. “I can’t tell if you’re telling the truth or fucking with me, big man.” And it really could be the latter. Phantoms? Did not sound real at all. Press f in the chat gentlemen.

“I’m telling the truth, of course!” Scar said, smiling in a way that said he could be lying. “Just make sure to hit the hay every few days and you should be fine. Phantoms can be an absolute pain to deal with.”

“I second that.” Grian said, his wings flicking as he hopped up a step onto another pathway. “Bdubs complains about being the only one who sleeps but secretly he likes it and will get mad if you try to take his title away from him.”

“So I shouldn’t sleep then? You’re giving me mixed messages.” Tommy said, confused. If he didn’t sleep, some made up monster could come after him. If he did, another Hermit might be annoyed. “Is he mad at me since I’ve been sleeping so much lately?”

Doc sighed, making Tommy jump. For a moment, he had forgotten about the creeper hybrid following close behind. “He’s not mad at all. Multiple people can sleep at the same time, it’s just that only one is needed for the time warp effect for everyone else. In fact, Bdubs will often push the others, including these two, to sleep more for their health. Just because we can go without sleep, doesn’t mean we should.”

“One time he tied me to my bed.” Grian said nostalgically. “I had been partway through the mansion and kept getting attacked by phantoms when it was nighttime and Xisuma saw my stats going up. It was nice, I slept for an entire day and then went back to working.”

“Uh.” Tommy said, not sure what to say to that. Was that supposed to be normal? It didn’t sound normal to him. He had never thought of tying someone down to make them sleep and an admin watching stats sounded creepy.

But no one else seemed to care about it though. Scar just kept chattering on about his base like the sleeping topic had never come up, Grian had that soft nostalgic smile, and Doc was gazing around and nodding along to Scar's words. So maybe it might actually be a normal thing and he didn't know like the elytra? The more time he spent here, the more it looked like his own server was a bit out of touch.

At the very least, Tommy wanted whatever update added elytras in. And an open end. Being able to fly whenever he wanted sounded cool, even if he'd have to pillar up.

"And this is the house where I keep most of my storage." Scar said, waving at another one. He could see barrels through the windows. "The mini chest monster I suppose."

Chest monster? Was that another mob? "Hope you know I'm going to steal all of your stuff big man." Tommy settled on, not wanting to look dumb.

"That's okay, you can have some of it. I usually keep my most important things in my inventory." Scar said with a casual shrug. "I move around between this place and my mega build and the shopping district pretty often. Honestly, I mostly use this place to store spare materials left over from my builds. Free game."

Fuck, he wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth. He missed having his armor and axe around. Not that he couldn't fight them without it, but still. There was something about the weight of the ax, the pressure of the armor that made it feel better.

And this time, he wouldn't even have to put it in the hole again! Suck it Dream!

"Would you even notice if someone took anything?" Grian said, his eyes glinting with humor. "I'm pretty sure I could empty out most of those chests and you would just put it down to your chest monster. You need to build an actual sorter."

"A sorter?" Tommy murmured, watching as the two fell into an argument that had the air of being repeated many times. An argument. That happened so many times, hissed fury being flung like clockwork, and yet, no one raised their voice or went for a weapon. Grian started laughing hysterically partway through, clearly amused by Scar's dogged defense of his blasphemy, whatever a sorter was.

They were just. Arguing. It was weirdly nice to see. Dream had always gotten furious with him for arguing back, claiming it meant he was disrespecting him. Even if he didn't really want to argue, he just wanted banter. Banter was nice! He was a champion at bantering.

"A chest sorter, we use them to automatically sort items into chests so we don't have to manually do it." Doc said gruffly. He turned towards the arguing pair. "I can't believe you're having an argument again--"

Okay, as cool as a chest sorter sounded, Tommy recognized a chance when he saw it. Stealthy as a fucking cat or some stealthy thing like that, he paced backwards, ducking behind one of the houses. Finally alone.

The relief was instant. Tommy almost slumped against the wall, rubbing his head with a pleased grin.

The Hermits were nice but it was weird. Smothering. He hadn't had a single second actually alone since he woke up and it was getting kind of hard! Man needs his space! He might have liked it more before the exile but so long alone with only one person bugging him every so often made it extra excruciating.

Tommy wasn't a baby. He didn't need chaperones or people wandering after him, holding his hand or ruffling his hair. He had survived 2b2t, the Antarctic Empire, Dream, he could survive having a few less hearts than normal. It didn't make him fragile.

He had been looking out for himself for a long time and a brief trip into somewhere as cool as Hermitcraft wasn't going to make him forget that.

He wasn't going to leave, not as long as they were his ticket home. He just needed time. Space. A bit of exploration, a bit of chaos. He was practically being tame right now, just poking around the village by himself. Maybe steal a few things, Scar had practically given him the go ahead. Nothing too dangerous, all good plans from the big man here!

Nodding to himself, Tommy circled around the houses, skirting around the edge of the town. It was beautiful, he had to admit, even if it made part of his brain wig out about the waste of it all. How easily he could destroy it.

Focus, Tommy, the part of his mind that sounded suspiciously like Tubbo said, time to get some resources before you need to go back.

He could punch a tree, there were tons of jungle trees nearby! Buuuuut, he was tired of punching trees. After becoming a world class champion at punching trees and crafting wood tools for reasons he didn't like thinking about, he was kind of done with the whole shebang. Punching trees wrecked his style. And the splinters were a pain too.

Just a quick trip to the storage building, he decided. Just a tiny bit of crime! And then he'd hop right back to his tour. He was pretty sure nobody had noticed him missing yet, which strangely stung, but he didn't hear any yelling. All he could hear was a bird screech, probably someone out in the jungle.

"Should have given me my comm back, you fucks." He mumbled under his breath. Then they could have commed him anyways. Could they really get mad if he mysteriously couldn't hear anything?

Tommy's smile widened when he saw the building they had passed a bit ago, the one with all the barrels. He didn't want to circle around, not when they were probably still arguing a bit down the path, but likely this one had a back door! Luckily for Scar that is, he absolutely would have broken one of the windows.

He stepped inside, darting to one of the barrels before his smile dropped into a scowl. Nothing but miscellaneous blocks, not even ones that could be used for tools or armor. Who had exactly 46 pieces of diorite? Scar apparently.

Weirdchamp.

It took four barrels before he finally unearthed his prize, a set of partially broken iron tools. They were a bit chipped and blunted but oh, it felt good to hold them in his hands. “I think I’ll call you Henrietta.” Tommy said to the axe, flashing it to his inventory. “Welcome to the team. Now, where would he keep his armor-”

A door slammed, Tommy spun around, his heart jackhammering against his ribs.

Doc loomed in the doorway, bloody red eye bright against the shadows. “You are in so much trouble, kid.” He rumbled. “I told you that if you wanted to leave the hospital while still hurt, you need to follow the rules.” One step forward, arms outstretched like he was going to grab him and-

Tommy ran.

Chapter End Notes

Grian was scanning from the sky and Scar was checking around the jungle's edge, Doc went for the buildings because he thought Tommy might head there. They literally noticed seconds after he disappeared and instantly panicked.

What they'll do because of that? That's for the next chapter.

But hey, at least Tommy got some alone time.

Into the Unknown

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings: Panic attack, mild victim blaming? Basically one of the hermits sink into their instincts and Tommy feels bad for causing it

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy slammed against the smooth wooden surface of the door, scrabbling for the door knob. Twice, his hand slipped off, slick with fear and adrenaline. He could hear talking to him, a low grumble that so so easily could change to a low monotone, ‘then die like one, Theseus-’

He could have sobbed in relief when the door swung open, sending him stumbling outside. A breeze by his shoulder told him the other had missed him by a hair and he stumbled his way into a sprint, ignoring how his muscles shrieked at him for doing so.

Stupid, stupid, stupid. Stupid for thinking he might be safe here, that the Hermits wouldn’t grow wise to how terrible he was. He should have run the moment he could, and let the admin deal with how to fix his code long distance instead of letting himself be lulled into a sense of complacency with food eating contests and tours. Stealing.

Betrayal had become all too familiar. And wasn’t that a fucking nightmare, that racing through the trees away from someone who he had once laughed with, talked with, liked was familiar?

Another shout. He flinched, shoulders hiked so far up that it was a miracle his arms were swinging at all as he ran. He swerved through the trees, hoping that none of them had a bow or arrows.

Wilbur had gotten shot when they fled L’manburg. Had stared at the arrow wound as if it was a personal betrayal, deeper than the wound of being exiled. If it wasn’t for him doggedly tending to it, even on the bad days, the infection probably would have killed him. Maybe he had. Maybe that was where everything had gone wrong. Maybe that infection had gone deeper than he thought, killing what was really Wilbur and living the empty husk behind-

His palms shrieked with pain, the tips of his fingers wet. He drew blood. Tommy forced himself to focus on the rhythmic thudding of his feet, only interrupted when he had to scramble over a bush.

There was yelling behind him still and he forced his way through a bush, trying to think. He could definitely take them, but he just- just didn’t want to. That was why. He had this in the bag if he wanted to fight but why embarrass them? He still needed the admin to at least want

to help him, even if it meant kicking him out quicker. So. He needed something else to escape these fuckers. Doc was real fucking tall wasn't he? Probably a real fast one.

Too bad Tommy was a hell of a lot fucking faster. He skidded into a turn, darting off at an angle that let him see the flicker of green skin through the trees, the flash of red from their eye. A shiver ran down his spine, he couldn't see the gleam of a weapon but he saw enough to know the other was too damn close. What little distance he had earned in his mad sprint had quickly been eaten up.

He made a snap decision, turning again, another way this time and really laying into his run. Trees flickered by, and it was only a full queasiness in his stomach at the thought of scampering up the side of one out of reach. Tommy wasn't scared, no, big men weren't scared of heights. He didn't want to go up there, trees were dumb.

"Tommy!" He heard from behind him as he hopped over a fallen log. "Come back here! I'm not going to hurt you!"

"Fuck you!" He shrieked back. As if he was going to believe that. Too many people had lied to his fucking face and said they weren't going to hurt him and then turned around and stabbed him in the back. Even as far back as 2b2t, people had tried to trick him with that and honestly? He was really fucking tired of it.

Fuck Doc. Fuck Grian. Fuck all the hermits. He wasn't going to be handed himself back in for punishment and they could just suck it! Ha!

...as soon as he figured out how to keep himself from getting caught.

The turns we're buying him a bit of time, he was just a little bit faster at wriggling through the thick underbrush. But Doc was faster still, seriously, was the dude modded or something? Eternally jazzed up with lightning juice? He did not remember Sam being this fucking fast. Doc was running through the undergrowth like a fucking machine and he couldn't escape how his heart was starting to beat against his chest, warning him that this chase wasn't ending.

There were no halfhearted mercenaries who broke off when they were firmly in their exile. No red eyed once brothers who'd leave once they got bored. Doc wasn't fucking stopping.

Could he take them, he considered, cringing a bit at the thought of his inventory. Not because it was bad, no, but of course the fuckers had an edge in him. He had no doubt that the hermits had the best tools, tricked out with enchantments and he had a set of half broken iron tools. Not exactly the best, not exactly like he couldn't buuuut- yeah. Fuck.

What would Tubbo do? Probably something incredibly confusing but weirdly clever. Tubbo was good at all these kinds of plans, it's like the world made sense to him, something he could easily break down into all the simple bits. He wasn't bad at it, no, he was the cleverest of all. But he just kind of. Snagged. When thinking of plans.

Snagged. That reminded him of something. A dim childhood memory, just after he was taken in by Phil and them. Playing around in a swamp. With vines. He had been having fun racing

around but Wilbur kept getting annoyed because he kept running into the patches of vines that Tommy had been too clever to run into. And too small but whatever about that.

And he was in a jungle where vines were thriving. Just up ahead, he could see a nice tangled up growth, woven together to create a thick curtain that nearly touched the ground.

Tommy turned once again, the breath whooshing out of him when he felt a light touch skid over his shoulder, sliding off without managing to take a hold. It was close though and he had to force down the desire to look back, knowing he wouldn't like what he saw.

Just a bit further, he chanted in his head, just a bit further. Just a bit further and he was free.

At the last moment, he threw himself forward into a roll, sliding under the rough tangle of vines.

Tommy rolled with it, popping up and glancing back instinctively when he heard a sharp warning hiss. Doc had been less lucky than him, slamming face first into the vines, his struggles only tangling him in further. He flinched as those sharp eyes landed on him. "Tommy." He said. "You need to--"

"I don't need to fucking do anything." Tommy said, puffing his chest out. What were they going to do about it? He was practically free. "You're the fucker who's trapped, not me. Deal with it."

"Tommy--" Tommy stuck his tongue out at him, turning and racing into the trees. No sense in not exploiting the lead he got. But he could help the infectious grin that took over his face.

He had just defeated one of the hermits and escaped them. And yeah, he'd probably have Xisuma chasing after him so the admin could kick him out for good but he did it! He did the fucking impossible! He got Doc to run headfirst into a bunch of vines!

Tubbo would think this was so cool, he just knew it. It would be such a good story for their bench meetings when he got back.

He let himself slow, just a bit as he thought it over. Where he could put in all the interesting stuff that made a good story, the kind of stuff that always had Tubbo roll his eyes with a smile.

Idly, he wondered where Scar and Grian were. Had they already left? Rude, he wanted his magnificent escape to be noticed, and not have most of them leave because they didn't care. Ugh. Or maybe they were still back by the village, Scar was a scrawny guy, he doubted the other could keep up with the big man himself-

A weight slammed into from behind, claws digging into his shoulders and Tommy had a brief moment of oh shit before he toppled forward, gagging weakly as all the breath was driven out of him in one fell swoop. It was a sickeningly familiar position, one he had been in before.

"Philza, what the fuck." He said softly but with feeling into the dirt. But no, wait, Philza wasn't here to swoop tackle him.

“No, birdie.” And Tommy felt himself still. Grian sounded mad. He cringed into the ground, far too aware of the avian’s claws on his back, so close to his neck. “Where did you think you were going?”

“I-” His throat felt oddly tight and he couldn’t make the words come out. It hurt, and not just the weight of the other pressing onto his sore back, rippling into his stomach. But the memories behind it, the horrible feeling of weakness as Grian pinned him as easily as a bug. “I- fuck you.”

Grian made a warning trill that seemed to make his muscles go into mush, laced with disappointment and anger. “That’s what you’re going to say, mate?” He said. Tommy flinched as the weight shifted but there was no sudden slash. Instead, Grian made a soft cooing noise. “After running off?”

“Get off?” He whispered. Tommy swallowed hard. “Fucking get off!”

“And let you run off again? This world is dangerous and you’re still wounded.” Grian said, an odd hissing edge to his words. “You could’ve stumbled right into a creeper! Or one of the building sites and maybe you’d thought this would be funny, but it’s not, mate.”

“Grian, please.” Tommy had to force the second word out. “I’ll fucking talk about it, take my punishment like a man and all, but you need to get off of me.”

He hated being pinned, hated the helplessness of it all. Grian could do anything to him right now and there was nothing he could do about it. Couldn’t reach for his sword or axe to get a good swing, or twist out of their grip, or run away. “Just- get off.”

“But you could run off and get hurt.” Grian said, all joking confidence gone and so vulnerable it almost made Tommy shrink in on himself.

“Please.”

“Grian. Get off of him.” Tommy froze, stiffening a bit at Doc’s voice. He couldn’t twist his head to see where the other was but Grian knew, judging by the hissing warble he made.

“Grian, he’s scared. I know you’re deep in your instincts but you need to get off.”

Fuck, instincts. He had been hoping Grian was just pissed, not under his instincts. He remembered when Techno used to fall into his instincts, becoming grumbly and aggressive to any outsiders to their little family. He would spend hours inside those days, the hybrids of the family carefully tending to him.

“Grian, now.” Prime fuck this. He never thought he’d be grateful to hear Doc before. Even if it was kind of weird that the other was on his side instead of Grian. “If you want, you can grab onto me or Scar. You like that, don’t you? We can even do a little preening session, your feathers are a mess.”

“Grian, old buddy, just calm down for a moment.” Scar said and Tommy tried not to think of the red blush spreading across his cheeks when he realized both the hermits were here.

Grian made a soft, hesitant chirp. “But he could get hurt.” He insisted.

A soft warble, another shift in weight, and Tommy felt his breathing pick up, desperate for the other to finally move. “You promised.” He whined. And maybe it was a bit childish but Grian did. He did promise. “You said you wouldn’t touch me unless I wanted to.”

Another hesitation, but this time, blessedly, Grian listened. Tommy nearly wheezed in relief when the weight was off his shoulders. He pushed himself up, scrambling into a sitting position as he pressed his hand to his heart and tried to calm its desperate thrumming. He nearly jumped out of his skin when a hand settled into his curls.

“Just me.” Scar said, sitting down next to him. Grian and Doc were talking by the edge of the clearing, Grian curled into Doc’s arms. Tommy glanced back as Scar slowly started combing through his curls. “Thought this would relax you a bit. It does for me. If you want, I can stop.”

It was kind of relaxing, the soft soothing motion and the gentle tingling of a touch on his head. He could feel himself droop a bit under the soft touch like a flower desperately craving sunshine. But he couldn’t exactly say that. “I don’t fucking care.” Tommy said, tucking his knees into his chest.

Would they attack him, if he pulled out his axe? He craved the weight of it in his hands, the feeling of power, but would they? Dream would have, he never liked it when Tommy pulled out his ax around him. Said good friends didn’t need weapons around each other and anyways, he provided all the security Tommy would ever need.

“If that’s what you want.” Scar said, pulling away. Tommy tried not to think of how much he wanted the other to start again. “Sorry about Grian. When he saw you had disappeared, the old fellow panicked. Sent him headfirst into his instincts.”

“Why? Worried about what kind of trouble I could get into?” Tommy said with a scoff.

Scar paused and Tommy tilted his chin up, meeting the other’s considering gaze head on. “Not at all! Why would you even think that? We didn’t know where you went and you didn’t answer when we started yelling. Of course we would look for you.”

“Then why did Doc chase me?” Tommy said. Why had the other loomed in the doorway, like- like- “He was being a fucking wrongun.”

Scar winced. “Yeah, Doc can come off as pretty intimidating to new people.” He said but there was something dreadfully soft about his eyes that made his skin itch a little. “It might have seemed scary but I promise, the man’s a big old softy. He wouldn’t have hurt you or anything.”

Like someone hurt you in the past. He could practically hear the meaning behind Scar’s words and it itched at him. The feeling of being seen as weak, as someone who’d get a bit frightened instead of running off into the forest like a baby instead of his totally manly retreat. “I don’t think I fucking believe that.” He mumbled, crossing his arms.

But he couldn't help the doubt that streaked across his mind at Scar's worried face. Would Doc have hit him? The way he had loomed in the doorway, the step closer, it felt like he would have. But could he have overthought it?

"Why not?" Scar asked. "I mean, I promise, as your friend, he wasn't going to. He helped fix you up after you got hurt and he was really quite worried about you."

Tommy mumbled something.

"What was that?"

"I was, uh, liberating a few items." Tommy mumbled. It made sense, okay? That's how everyone reacted when they saw him stealing. They'd yell, they'd run after him, and they'd get mad. And he'd get a few hits if he didn't go running fast enough. It didn't matter if they were wood or iron, though he preferred diamond himself, it was hard to go grinding on the server and so every item you collected was valuable. After all, who knew if the next time you went mining would be the time everything got fucking ripped away from you.

He tried very hard not to think of ash holes in the ground, smoke still drifting away.

"Oh, those?" Scar said with a frown. "Why would anyone get mad at you for stealing? I said it was alright if you wanted to take a few things and a businessman's word is his deal, ya know?"

"I took tools." Tommy challenged. With a flash of light, the iron ax fell into his hands. But Scar's face never changed, he never looked mad or scared.

"I don't exactly use iron tools. Think of the time mining! If you wanted to pick up my old set, that's perfectly fine and Doc would know that." Scar said. Tommy could feel his breath coming short as he stared into the other's vividly blue eyes. "You didn't have to sneak away either! Just ask."

"And you would have just let me take it." Tommy said. He knew Scar had something about that but he didn't expect it to be true. But Scar was nodding away, his face serious.

"As long as you talk to us beforehand and it's not being used in a project," he said with a shrug. "Oh, and not from the shops either but if you want diamonds, most hermits are happy to share so you can buy things. We were all new to the server once and understand it can be a bit of an adjustment."

That just didn't sound true. But. But it made sense. If this place really was weird enough that they didn't fight, people could afford to go on long mining expeditions. They could afford to leave their home undefended long enough to actually collect extra.

Prime, he couldn't remember the last time he had gotten to keep what he mined. Before exile, definitely. "Fucking weird." Tommy said with a huff, letting the ax disappear. "But you guys are way too smothering still."

“You’re injured.” Scar insists and Tommy has to fight the urge to not swat at him. He was tired of that.

“I told you guys it's not a big deal.” He insisted. “It doesn’t hurt that bad and it’s already healed up. I’m getting really fucking tired of you guys following me around like I’m a delicate little flower or something.”

He had been through two wars, not counting the disc fights or pet wars, and exile, and never had anyone fussed so much about his health before. Part of it was nice, yeah, but he was real tired of it. He wanted to go do his own thing without someone fussing about the big bad world.

“I’m sorry about that.” He couldn’t help the slight jolt when he heard Grian speak. But the other didn’t move closer, wings hanging so low they were almost pressed to the growth. “I’m so sorry about that, the instincts took over and you weren’t there and I panicked and it just all hit at once, mate.”

“It’s cool, right? Instincts suck.” Tommy said awkwardly. Techno had talked about it a few times, the gnawing urge to do something until it eclipsed all rational thought. Grian hadn’t meant to scare him, just... instincts triggered. Like Techno would say, that hadn’t been themselves when they did it and really, they were kind of worried about him? It would be kind of shitty of him to hold that against him and he was nothing if not the biggest of men.

“That they do.” Grian said, his normally confident smile a bit weak. “We’re not trying to smother you, we’re just concerned for you. It messes with my instincts knowing you’re hurt and running around somewhere.”

“But I’m not hurt.” Tommy insisted, stubbornly ignoring the stabbing pain in his stomach. “And, look, I know this makes you guys feel better, but I don’t want to keep doing this. I’d rather go build a dirt shack and wait in there then sit in my boring bedroom or get followed everywhere I go.”

At least it would be his dirt shack. His area to live in, his. Not mooching off of people until they got tired of him. “Am I gonna get my glitch cooties everywhere if I stay in one spot?”

Scar looked a bit uncomfortable at the question. “You need to stay where Xisuma can treat you.” he said.

“But that doesn’t mean it has to be at your community building, yeah? I could just go build my own shack for a bit and wait. He can quarantine me there and I can finally get some quiet.” Tommy said stubbornly. Surely, that’d be alright. What did it matter that he was hanging at his own place and not in the community building? Could Xisuma just fix the code there? Would even be easier on the other, they wouldn’t have to worry about their own houses or building getting fucked up.

“Hermitcraft can be more dangerous than typical servers.” Doc said. Tommy rolled his eyes. Just about every server said they were more dangerous than a typical server. “Mobs are usually armored or carrying weapons and the spawn rate is increased. You’re not safe out there alone, especially on four hearts.”

“I think I am.” Tommy challenged. “I’m a big man and I’m not afraid of mobs.”

“Birdie-”

“Fine then.”

“Wait, fucking what?” Tommy said. Grian made an odd screechy sound but Doc’s gaze was even.

“You can go if you’d like.” Doc said. “But you’ll need to check in every few days and we’ll also be sending people around to check in on you. You can’t leave the jungle because Xisuma will need you close but you can have your solo base.”

Tommy perked up. “Fucking finally.” he said. He was totally going to ace this. Finally got to do his own thing.

“But if anything goes wrong.” Doc said, staring into Tommy’s eyes. “Mobs, food issues, anything. You’ll need to return to the community building as you call it. I don’t want to do this but if it’s the only way to show you that we aren’t playing around with your health, I will.”

“No need.” Tommy said, bouncing to his feet. “I’ve got this in the bag. I’ll see you fuckers later, maybe I’ll build my own megabase, eh?”

If he had turned around slower, maybe he would have seen Doc pulling Grian back before he lunged, the strange blue smoke around Scar’s fingers. Instead, Tommy headed into the forest, whistling Cat as he went. Might as well go now before they changed their minds. There was no way anything could even touch him.

“Why would you do that!” Grian snapped. Scar winced, gently pushing himself to his feet. Grian was furious, but he could understand it, the other had been brooding since the lad showed up. “He just left!”

“He needed to.” Doc said. Grian made one of his angry bird noises, and Scar sighed, settling next to his friends. Grian’s feathers were fluffed again and he itched to fix them a bit.

“Now, now, you know what he’s referring to. I’m surprised, you were the most against this trip.” Scar said. It had taken a lot of wheedling and his business skill to get Doc to agree to letting Tommy out of bed. He and Stress had been very worried about him pulling his wounds back open. And now the creeper hybrid was letting him race off into the jungle. “Letting him go just like that? Not even a friend for the road?”

“I’m not.” Doc said peaceably. Grian froze. “You two both understood that we wanted you safe and that meant staying close. Tommy refuses to see it.”

“That’s true.” Scar said, folding his hands together. He had been desperate for friendly attention when he arrived, playing up the hijinks and laughs. It had been so relieving to have people who understood him, who laughed instead of insulted. And Grian, poor Grian, had

needed a lot of hugs after what he went through. It had taken ages before the other had grown comfortable receiving the affection he needed.

And Tommy, poor Tommy. Soaked up affection like a plant soaked up sunlight. Played right along with his jokes with the air of someone who hadn't had a good business deal or practical joke for years. He could see himself in the lad and it made him nervous.

And the injuries. Scar wasn't there for Tommy's arrival but he had held Grian when the other fled back to his nest, trailing Mumbo behind. Someone had deliberately hurt the boy and it stung to have him reject their offers of help.

"One or two of the other Hermits were like him before." Doc said, matter of fact. "Tango for one. Convinced they didn't need help, too afraid. They'd run off and get themselves into trouble if you left it and after Tango's near drowning, Xisuma and Etho figured out how to approach it. Easiest way to approach it is to allow them that mistake and wait for them to come back."

"And if he doesn't?" Grian challenges. "You said it yourself, mate, Tommy's a spitfire. And his health can't handle being on survival alone."

"That's why we don't leave it to chance. If he wants danger, then he'll get it, with a safety net to protect him before it goes too far. As soon as it sinks in, we'll pull him back out. Otherwise, we'll be fielding escape attempts the entire time he's still healing." Doc said, pulling out his comm. He clicked a few buttons, the soft chiming of a call ringing out.

"Everything alright?"

"Raise the mob spawn rates around Tommy, Xisuma. Hardcore mode."

"But-" Grian paused, glancing at Scar. Scar frowned, slowly shaking his head. Tommy did need a reality check, that the world could be dangerous or he'd keep running off. They were adults, had had years to work through their issues, and still got injured occasionally. Tommy was so young, so hurt. A penny now to prevent a pound later. "Fine. But I'm going to do some detective work while I wait. I finally got a name."

Chapter End Notes

Sometimes, the easiest way to convince a baby bird the nest is safe is to shove them out for a little bit. Don't worry, the Hermits won't let Tommy get hurt! They just want him to... understand. And if that means letting him think he gets to go off on his own with no minder because he finally wore them down into agreeing, then they'll do it.

Basically, Hermits are kind of convinced that mental healing means being kind of smothered even if someone doesn't want to be. And if they don't want to be then clearly it's because they don't realize how good it is to accept help. So what do you do? You make it so they understand that they need it. This is not what you should do. The hermits

really need a therapist. Do not do this. Unfortunately, Tommy's been having a heck of a few months and it's hard seeing the forest for the trees.

New Friends and New Enemies

Chapter Notes

Short chapter today! Lots of reasons for that, but long story short, the next one should be longer.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Bunch of fuckers.” Tommy mumbled, hopping over a tree with barely a wince. “Yeah, this place looks really terrifying guys. I might even cry!”

He had already been walking for a good ten minutes and this place was practically fucking idyllic or some shit. He had thought it was just Scar’s town, but now, apparently the entire jungle was just... weirdly nice?

There were no holes in the ground from a creeper or tnt explosion, left unpatched. The bark of the trees weren’t marked by errant sword swings or ash from fires. Even the trees themselves looked stronger, healthier. He could see flickers of colors fluttering through the branches.

“You gotta be kidding me.” He hopped up on a log, beaming when he saw what they were. Parrots! A whole bunch in all kinds of colors, from a pretty blue yellow bobbing up and down on a branch to a little green one hopping along a log.

How long had it been since he had seen parrots? There were no jungles close to spawn or to L’manburg. Even his exile had lacked jungles to explore and they appeared nowhere else. He knew of them vaguely through other people talking about them, he was pretty sure Dream had talked about having a pet parrot.

Sapnap had killed it.

He watched a little red parrot fly down, landing in a bush. They were so little, so fragile looking. But completely fearless as it hopped along the branches, plucking at the leaves. Tommy raised a hand, dropping it after a moment’s hesitation.

He wasn’t scared, he just... wasn’t sure if touching them was a good idea. The parrots were all so small, not like Henry or Mushroom Henry who were almost as tall as him and built like it. He could really hurt them if he did something wrong.

But curiosity lingered. Were they soft? Would it be like touching Phil’s wings? Or something completely different? Phil had seemed annoyed in the past when they compared him to a parrot but how different were feathers? Grian’s had been soft, he knew from having them brush by him.

He hesitated again, looking at the little red one. It didn't fly away when he inched closer. Instead, it glanced up, tilting its head in a move that was so Grian like that he nearly laughed out loud. "Maybe you're a relative of his." Tommy told it. Grian's feathers were pretty bright, yeah? Far more colorful than Philza's were. It tilted its head, making a squawking noise. Tommy couldn't help the smile that broke out over his face.

"Oh, you're a gorgeous woman." He said, inching closely. "Absolutely lovely. I bet everyone fights over you. Red is my favorite color, you know, and you are wearing it perfectly."

The parrot squawked again but still didn't move away. Tommy hesitated one more time, checking if anyone could see him. He couldn't see anyone nearby, not even the soft glimmer that came from potion users. But one could never be too careful.

He lost way too many pets by someone seeing him like this. They couldn't fight back, couldn't realize when they were in danger from someone else looking to leverage a bit of weakness. His hands spasmed once and Tommy took a deep breath. A soft squawk broke him out of his thoughts, the parrot was looking at him.

As he watched, the parrot hopped off the bush, fluttering to the ground. Tommy flinched back, certain it was going to take off, leaving him behind. But it didn't. Instead, the little red parrot hopped closer, watching him with his dark eyes.

"Oh, you're very good." He whispered, melting a bit as he watched it. "You like me! You really like me!"

He couldn't help it, Tommy crouched low to the ground, reaching forward. The parrot watched him with interest, cooing a bit when his fingers slowly traced over his head. It cooed, pushing into the touch. Feeling a bit braver, Tommy began to pet it, slowly stroking the feathers.

They were soft. Not quite as tough as Phil's feathers, gift from the goddess of death and meant to be tougher than anything. But soft in the way Grian's feathers were, warmed by the sun. He let out a small shuddering breath, watching how the bird leaned into his touch. So completely unafraid. He could fuck up right now, hurt the bird, and it didn't care. There were only now and scratchies.

"I'm going to call you Bird Henry." He told it. "Because that's a pog name for a poggers bird."

Fuck, how do you even tame parrots? He knew there was a procedure or some shit, a way to get approved by the animal so the pet mechanics kicked in. He had never paid much attention to it, cows weren't usually under pet mechanics unless you modded it and Dream had refused the last time he asked. But parrots did have the ability to follow their owner around with the same strange teleportation method as Techno's dogs. It was seeds for birds, yeah? The kind you used to grow wheat.

He pulled his hand away, smiling at the indignant chirp the parrot made. "I'll come pet you in a bit." He told it. "Just stay right here and wait, I'm gonna go get something. Hold your horses."

It let out another indignant chirp but didn't move. Tommy kept a careful eye on it as he turned around, looking for patches of tall grass. It took a bit of scrambling through bushes to find some and he was pretty sure he had well and thoroughly broken Xisuma's no swearing rule by now. He yanked his foot free of a low hanging vine with another curse, uncaring of how dirt smeared his clothes.

The first stalk yielded nothing and he tossed it aside with a grumble of annoyance. "Phil made this look fucking easy." He grumbled. The old man had never had a problem feeding the crows that followed him around. He grabbed another stalk, carefully combing between the blades and peeling them away from the main stalk. "Fuck yeah!" Tommy whooped in excitement, throwing his hands up

Hidden in the center of the plant was a tiny amount of green seeds, vivid against his dirt smeared palm. "I'm the fucking man." Tommy said, carefully placing them in his inventory. "Best seed finder in the world, that's me."

Just a few more, gotta hedge his bets if he was going to do this. He wasn't sure why Bird Henry would want to say no but wouldn't they want some treats afterward? Henry and Mushroom Henry had always been so happy when he had given them hay. He searched a few more stalks of grass, finding two more piles of seeds, before finally calling it quits.

Scrambling back through the bushes was tense, trying to remember where he had come from. He was a master of directions, a regular human gos, but uh, this jungle was out to get him! It took him far too long and he had to double back once, to make it to the little clearing with a bush. An empty clearing with no cheery red bird.

His heart plummeted, face falling. Did he go to the wrong place? Or had bird Henry decided to leave him? Go off and do bird things with his bird friends, who cares about that human guy.

A soft squawk, and a blur of red swooped by his head, landing on the ground. Tommy beamed, crouching down. "Were you waiting in the trees?" He asked. The bird had the same speckled head, blue spots all over the red, instead of being a solid color. Bird Henry!

It squawked, hopping closer. "I got you some treats so we can be friends. Dunno why you wouldn't want to be my friend but you gotta have some treats to make the pet bond." Tommy rambled on, reaching into his inventory. He pulled out a handful of seeds, on the verge of offering them when something made him freeze.

Should he be doing this? This wasn't his server. He didn't even have a place to live, just a bunch of people grudgingly letting him live here until they kicked him out. Could you even take a pet to another server? Most of Techno's dogs had been given to friends who had lived on their big server and could look after them. Who would want to look after Bird Henry for him, especially if he was never coming back?

It would probably take a lot of coding for Bird Henry to come with him, a lot of extra work for Xisuma who was already dealing with the glitch.

The glitch. Tommy felt his stomach curdle, hand pulling back. What if by establishing the pet bond, he glitched Bird Henry out and hurt him? Fixing a player was one thing, but fixing his stupid mistake? Xisuma wouldn't agree. Dream definitely wouldn't have.

"Someone would have hurt you even if I could take you back." Tommy said mournfully, slowly closing his hand. Dream had never liked Mushroom Henry, they had been nice to them and played along with it, but there was always something dark in the movements. The edge of a threat if Tommy went too far, a threat that had come true. And if it wasn't Dream, it could be Sapnap, or Techno, or quite a few other people who would hold a pet against him.

And Bird Henry was so small. It would be so terribly easy.

"You're still a pretty pog bird though," Tommy said. "Maybe I can get you to follow me around even without the seeds. I'm a pretty pog guy myself. Pog people have to stick together after all."

A spark of pain. Tommy swore, hand spasming open as he hopped back, flailing slightly. When he looked down, Bird Henry was perched on his wrist, beak clacking. With a quick movement, it swallowed, a red aura briefly surrounding it before disappearing.

Tommy stared at the bird. Bird Henry stared back.

"Did you. Did you just steal the seeds and become my pet?" He asked. Bird Henry squawked at him, bobbing up and down. "I know I'm pog but really?"

If Bird Henry was now his pet then... Tommy brought his wrist up to his shoulder and without a bit of encouragement, Bird Henry hopped on, making himself nice and snug. Just like what Dream said his parrot would do.

With a deep shuddering breath, Tommy sat heavily down, staring at the green seeds still scattered over the ground. He wasn't sad. He wasn't. It was just weird because he felt like he should be, that the world was pressing down on him.

Bird Henry was his forever. His pet, his friend. There was no real way to destroy the bond between a pet and a player, it was something that ran code deep. Not even admins would break that kind of bond. Henry was his.

And that was... and that was... He didn't know. He had no idea what he should be feeling right now. Some parts of him were delighted, crooned about the weight on his shoulder, the feel of feathers as they brushed past his ear. The other part of him was terrified because Bird Henry was now his, and that was... That was a lot.

What if he hurt him? What if someone else hurt him? He was the biggest of men and the best at fighting but accidents... accidents were so terribly possible. He could feel himself start to breathe quicker, the terrible accidents that could happen flitting through his mind's eye. *Put your stuff in the hole, Tommy.*

"Dream wouldn't." He mumbled to himself, the words sounding thin and weak even to him. "He's my friend, he wouldn't hurt them. The hermits wouldn't either, they've been so terribly

nice to him.”

But could he? Could he be sure? Maybe he should leave, maybe-

A sharp pain from his ear. Tommy yelped, reaching up and prodding Bird Henry until the bird let go of his ear. “What the fuck? The hell was that for?”

Bird Henry gave him a gimlet stare, looking at the green seeds that were scattered across the ground. “You can get those yourself.” Tommy huffed. “Your wings aren’t broken.”

He yelped as the parrot went after his ear again, snapping and clacking their beak. “Fine, fine! I’ll get them for you.” He kneeled slowly, carefully plucking up the green seeds. When he had them all, Bird Henry settled on his wrist again, delicately eating the seeds. “You’re a bit of a bitch, aren’t you?”

Tommy watched the bird eat, carefully considering how much it ate. Bird Henry didn’t stop until all of the seeds were gone, he was going to have to gather a lot of them to make sure that his friend stayed fed and healthy. And that it didn’t try to eat him. “Most people say I can be a bit of a bitch too though.” Tommy said, wiping his hand off on his pants. Bird Henry resettled on his shoulder.

Bird Henry let out another soft squawk. “Can you only eat wheat seeds?” Tommy wondered. Parrots could eat melon seeds too, right? He had seen a few melons underneath a tree while he was walking. If he doubled back now, he could collect the seeds and build a small shelter. It was growing close to evening now, the call of animals beginning to quiet. Most of the parrots had already started to head higher into the trees.

Tommy turned, jogging back to where he last saw the melons. “You better appreciate these.” He told Bird Henry, his ax falling into his hand with a flash, he broke open a melon with a sharp swing before tossing it back into his inventory.

The fruit was a bright red color, speckled with black seeds that he carefully dug out, offering them one by one to the hungry bird. Bird Henry made it through most of one half of the melon before finally turning its beak up, shuffling around so it wasn’t facing his hand. “Finally.” Tommy said with a soft grumble, not really meaning it.

He’d bring Bird Henry all the seeds he could ever want.

With a soft rumble, his stomach reminded him that it had been a while since he had eaten as well. Watching Bird Henry eat had made him aware of how hungry he was, the bird snatching up the seeds like it hadn’t eaten in weeks.

He glanced down at the melon, eyeing it with longing. How long had it been since he had eaten watermelon? He remembered faintly having it once with Phil, Techno, and Wilbur. They had gathered around the fire, Phil carefully slicing the melon up before distributing it into everyone’s bowls. There hadn’t been many melons on the Dream SMP and no one had any time to go and look for the sweetest melons, let alone eat what could be precious potion ingredients.

It hadn't been that long since he had eaten. But surely, nobody would care. There was nobody around but Bird Henry who had vacuumed up as many seeds as it could fit in its belly. The melons were in the middle of the forest, clearly growing wild. No one would care if he swiped a few. No one would even have to know.

He dug out a handful of melon sticking it into his mouth. Sun warmed and juicy, it filled his mouth with sugary sweetness. Before he knew it, he was ravenously devouring the melon, working through one of the full halves before his stomach started protesting.

It was nice, a bit lonely with no one to talk to but he was used to that. Scar had been so loud while they were eating, constantly talking about everything from building to creating games. Louder than Dream had been.

Tommy tossed the other half of the watermelon into his inventory with a frown. He was fine. This was fine. He had a bitching pet parrot, watermelon, tools, everything he could need. Better even than being in exile. He wasn't going to race back to the hermits and beg them to talk to him.

"Think it's about time for us to build a house, yeah?" He told Bird Henry, pulling his shovel out of his inventory. "I'm a master house builder, don't get too excited when I start."

It took him far too long to reach the side of a small hill, perfect to dig into, the orange sky beginning to fade into cool twilight. Tommy gritted his teeth, burying the shovel into the earth and pulling out a block of dirt.

He was cutting it a bit close but it should be fine. On the Dream SMP, it took a little bit for the mobs to start appearing once night fell and even longer before they grew to a number large enough to be dangerous. Zombies and skeletons were fairly easy to take care of with an iron axe, and creepers were rarer.

Still, he couldn't help how his pace quickened, shoveling as fast as he could to make a place big enough to sleep in.

He nearly mistook the patch of dark green for leaves moving, Bird Henry's panicked squawk being his own warning to jump back before the zombie crashed into him. "What the fuck!" Tommy yelled, slamming the shovel into the side of its head. It staggered but didn't fall, shambling forward.

It took three hits to take it down, the monster's body crumbling away into code. Tommy panted hard, staring down at it with wide eyes. That was fast. Really fast. He thought he'd be safe to dig for at least a few minutes more.

Groaning made him look up and he gaped. Three more zombies were already beginning to shamble out of the forest. But worse was what they had. One wore a rusty chainmail chestplate, another clutched a chipped and cracked iron sword.

"What the absolute fuck is this place?"

Chapter End Notes

Tommy gets a therapy parrot!

Late Night Fights

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: Canon Typical Violence, mild depressive thoughts

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy gritted his teeth. Why the fuck did these zombies have items? Mobs carrying weapons or armor were rare on the Dream SMP, even more so if you stuck around the lived in areas where torches were left everywhere. He dropped his shovel, deciding having it wasn't worth it yet.

What was important was not getting his ass kicked by mobs on his first night.

One, two- he dodged under the zombie's clumsy swing with the sword, ignoring Bird Henry's squawk of surprise, the weight disappearing from his shoulder as he threw himself forward to dodge around the zombie horde.

"Henry! Get in the trees and stay!" He yelled, hoping the parrot obeyed. He was pretty sure mobs that were hostile to humans were hostile to parrots as well and Bird Henry was terrifyingly defenseless. They had claws yeah, but they were little ones, not like Philza's or even Grian's small talons. If the zombies went after them, they could get really hurt.

He didn't have a chance to see if the bird had obeyed before he had to fling himself forward again, gasping as the roll put pressure on his still bruised back. He jumped back to his feet, rolling his shoulders. The zombies were still slow but the clearing was small and he couldn't flee too far without losing his cave.

Not that he wanted to run but... He really had no option left but to fight them. His sword fell into his hand with a flash of light and brought it up to block the iron sword zombie's clumsy swing, letting the momentum of the swing carry it into the unarmored zombie that stood to the side. It let out a short moan, staggering backwards as code fizzed at the edges of the slash.

But he couldn't break yet, he dodged underneath the third zombie's swing, jabbing at the sword zombie's stomach, skipping backwards to avoid its retaliatory swing.

Fuck, when they said hardcore, he thought they meant it was like. Normal mobs. Scar looked like he could get clobbered in a single punch, who the fuck would think to out that guy into a hard world, infinite lives or not?

But this was actual hardcore stuff. It had been a long time and he was far from that warm safe nest, wrapped in the wings of someone who promised to love him forever (and lied) but he still dimly remembered a few of the stories. They were Phil's best stories and Wilbur had loved to brag about them.

What did Phil say about fighting hardcore mobs? They carried weapons more often, that was obvious as he parried another slash, swiping at it to drive it back. They were tough too. His arm was hurting by how hard the zombie swung, and he was a big man, Phil was old so no wonder he'd struggle a bit.

He wasn't out of practice! Dream might have been practicing on most of the mobs nearby and always turned down his invitation to actually spar with barely disguised disappointment that he was causing trouble again even if he was just bored, but he wasn't out of practice! He just. Practiced on trees and stuff. Big men like him didn't fall out of practice, out of two wars, stuff like battle plans were practically carved into his bones.

He made a perfectly rational plan, a calculated maneuver, that meant he got absolutely nailed in the stomach by one of the zombies, the rotting fist driving into his stomach.

It was instinct alone that had him staggering back, mind fuzzing over in a blaze of pain. Laced with shame, it wouldn't normally hurt this fucking bad but the zombie had managed to land a hit squarely on his still healing wound. His stumbled clumsily, barely ducking under the third zombie's swing, chest still heaving for breath.

It hurt. It hurt so bad that he could barely breath from the pain of it, heart beating an endless drum of 'ow ow ow ow'. The kind of pain that radiates outwards until it fills him up from head to toe.

And guiltily, stupidly, he wished he had never left the hermits. Never left that warm bed that came with free healing potions and food, where all he had to do was sleep and talk when he wanted to ~~and get the hugs he so craved~~. Had made them force him out when they inevitably got sick of his antics.

If he had stayed, he wouldn't be here, fighting against three zombies in a darkened forest, nerves wired by the fact that at any moment more could arrive and trying to force air back into his uncooperative lungs. They had been smothering and babying him and some part of him was always on edge waiting for the knife in the back but it had been nice to be cared about. But now he was here.

Tommy gritted his teeth, using the hilt of the sword to brutally slam one of the zombies back, forcing himself back into a fighting stance.

He could do this. He could. He had to. He couldn't exactly go back and whine at them to help them, they'd just realize the annoying little leech that had joined their server. He had been through far worse than three abnormally tough zombies.

He ducked under the zombie's slash, popping up to drive his sword into the unarmored zombie. It crumbled into dust and he let out a whoop of excitement, spinning to slash sword zombies arm, it didn't drop it, not registering the pain but it's next swing was slower.

Two now. Those were far better odds. Tommy ducked to the side, agilely lunging to the side and slash his sword against the armored zombie's side, hissing in annoyance as the wound stuck but no coding appeared. The armor was complicating things, it must have increased the

number of hits they could take or whatever which was absolute bullshit and he would fistfight whoever thought that was a fucking good idea.

He drives the sword forward, grinning triumphantly as it cuts a neat hole through the armor. This time the wound began to leak code, a sure sign the mob was low now.

The next hit had it crumbling into dust, Tommy whooping in pride as he jumped back-

Only to scream as fiery pain traced a line along his side.

It was even more agonizing than the punch to his stomach. If that had been a steady pain that drove the breath out of his throat, this was like a wildfire that seemed to eat away at him but by bit. Tommy staggered a bit, feeling strangely dizzy with the pain.

He tried to force himself to move, to do something, cursing at himself for being slow and unreactive. Why the fuck was he so slow to recover? He had taken worse slashes when he had been in the middle of the war for independence, fuck, he had taken worse slashes in spars. He had slashes that had needed health pots to heal and was still able to fight but this one had his knees trembling with the effort of standing, barely able to make himself stagger back from the slowly advancing zombie.

It was two hearts max-

Two hearts of four hearts. And he'd wage anything that that punch had taken off one heart, as well placed as it was. Meaning he was down to one. One with an actively bleeding wound and burns on his stomach.

Hearts were just like little images of health, yeah? That was how Tubbo had explained it, that just because you had one heart didn't mean you were healthy until you dropped to one. At least, Che was pretty sure that was what Tubbo had fucking meant, he kind of zoned out when the other had started getting into the less fun code stuff.

It was impressive and terrifying that Tubbo knew the exact shade of red used for the heart meter.

But one heart was like the bad stuff. The 'you're on the verge of dying' kind of stuff and it showed. Going on one heart meant it was time to run.

But each step pulled the wound open again, crimson blood spilling down his side and staining his shirt. Each step sent ribbons of fire down his legs.

He was a big man but even he had to admit this was bad as fuck.

Not ideal. Not ideal at fucking all and not for the first time, he cursed this crazy fucking server. Tommy braced himself for another slash, seeing the slow clumsy swing but unable to fence himself back far enough to dodge it-

A flash of red and for a moment he thought he was his blood in the air until he realized blood wasn't supposed to be screeching.

Bird Henry flew in the face of the zombie like a bird possessed, wildly flapping their wings and screeching. They swiped their claws out, scoring thin lines down the zombie's green flesh. It lurched back, clumsily swatting at the nimble little bird.

Tommy didn't waste a moment, half lunging and half stumbling forward to slam the sword into the zombie's chest. He followed it with a brutal slash that saw the zombie crumbling into nothing but data.

He panted harshly, staring at where the zombie had been, his sword still dripping the blackish blood of the mob. Henry chirped and he glanced up, seeing the little red bird perch on the ground nearby.

"Good friend. Best bird." Tommy said, hissing a bit in pain as the movement drew a blaze of pain from his side. He lowered the sword, pressing a hand to his side and grimacing when it came away coated in crimson. "Fucking-"

He cut himself off with a snap, pulling his inventory open with his free hand. The watermelon fell into his free hand and Tommy took a big bite, nearly gagging at the taste of sweet melon covered in blood. Probably should have wiped his hand off first. You couldn't get sick from eating your own blood, right? He was pretty sure you didn't.

Another big bite and this time the familiar tingle of healing started, the leftover energy going towards his wounds. It wouldn't heal him to full hearts, the health lock made sure of it, but it should get him up to the new max of four and hopefully stop the bleeding. He could almost see the dip in his hunger bar as the tingle faded away, the two bites of watermelon not enough.

Tomorrow, he'd need to go hunting and get some meat so it wouldn't take so long to heal. Tommy went for another bite, half fantasizing about the taste of beef, the thick taste of char, the chew-

A soft thunk, the thick watermelon slice exploded into sticky goo. Tommy reared back with a yelp, the second arrow narrowly missing him. He threw himself to the ground, dodging the next bolt and taking the slight moment of respite to look up.

Fuck. How many of those fuckers were there? A skeleton was half hidden behind a tree but what Tommy was focused on were the two zombies lumbering toward him. These two had rusted iron armor, smeared and chipped from their previous battles. There was a brackish smear of blood around the neck of one that Tommy did not want to look at.

There was a quiet clicking sound that told him spiders were nearby as well. Fucking hell. How fast were the spawn rates here? Phil hadn't mentioned mobs spawning this fast, or immediately beelining towards him.

Tommy brought his sword up. "I was fucking eating that!" He yelled. But inside, he was wondering how much health he had back. It couldn't be more than two hearts, the shot had kept the arrow from killing him instantly but there was no way he regened to the full four.

The wound on his side had stopped bleeding but was nowhere near healing fully. Every step he took sent a twinge of pain through his side, a reminder that one wrong move and this fight would go from bad to absolutely fucking terrible.

This was a real fucking unfair fight. Time to make it less fair for the rest of them.

He skirted around the side, keeping an eye on the skeleton as it drew back its bow. The arrow on the end looked nasty, the flint chipped and worn, stained on the tip. He could practically hear Phil's chiding words now, *just because it wasn't a potion arrow doesn't mean it can't make you sick*.

At least the zombies were still slow as fuck. He had to keep backing away but their slow lumbering kept them from reaching him as long as he kept moving.

He jumped to the side, putting one of the zombies between him and the skeleton. The arrow landed in the back of the zombie's skull with a sickening thunking sound like an ax being buried in a wet log. The zombie paused, ignoring how its friend lumbered past them to go after the juicy human prey.

Tommy held his breath, valiantly resisting the urge to swear at it like a true champion. Would it take the bait? The zombie turned, walking the other way and Tommy barely held back the whoop of joy as he saw the skeleton look away from him, empty eye sockets staring at the zombie.

It took a real big man to get the mobs to fight each other instead of him. There was a clatter of bone, the zombie reaching the skeleton before it could loose another arrow at it. Tommy took advantage of the distraction, slashing viciously at the zombie still approaching him.

The first slash scraped off the armor but the second dug into the zombie's side, Tommy gagging a bit at the persistent stench of rot that filled the clearing now. It was persistent and everywhere, the scent of old blood left to rot and congeal, mixed with something that was unpleasantly but recognizable zombie.

He had to be more careful of slipping now, the grass slick with black blood and watermelon as he dodged the zombie's clumsy attacks, missing his own bow. It had been a real beauty he had enchanted, before it burned anyways. Maybe if he had stayed a little longer, he could have enchanted another one...

He shook his head, driving the thought out as he feinted to the left before slicing the zombie's arm off. It didn't matter now. He couldn't go back and he doubted that he would be staying long enough to enchant weapons, let alone them allowing him to. Who would be so stupid as to give the guy who broke into their server weapons? Not even Phil would be such a dumbass, even back when he was kind and gentle to him.

Scar would have, something in the back of his mind whispered. He let you steal the iron tools from him. He said that you could take anything you wanted and didn't even care when you showed him proof that you stole. He would have let you create an enchanted bow. Might have even given you the equipment for it.

No, he wouldn't, Tommy reminded himself stubbornly, putting a bit extra power into his next slash. His foot slid as he lunged, ever so slight but enough that it didn't dig as deep as he wanted and he had to stumble hastily back before the zombie bit him.

He tries to push the thought out of his head but once the speculation has taken root, it wouldn't stop growing. Would the hermits have really stopped him from gathering weapons? It would have been so easy to hurt Scar back there, so close and not even wearing armor. It would have been even easier hurting Grian, he had been pinned yeah, but he had been in worse situations before.

It would have been easy. So so easy. He had been trained by The Blade himself, in between the guy fussing over him until eventually even that faded away. Had been through two wars and they had to know that without how they looked at the scars on his arms.

But they had never seemed to care. Scar had never reached for his armor and neither had Grian. Tommy would say the same for Doc but that guy looked like he could eat mobs for breakfast. Grian was scary, yeah, Dream Killer and all that but Tommy had never even seen a hint of someone who could've killed Dream other than the swoop tackle. But none of them had ever put on armor, Prime, the only people he saw wearing armor was Xisuma and these zombies.

And weirder, he had never even really thought about it. No pranks from the big man here, and yeah he kind of was a glitch leeching off their kindness, but still. Dream would be proud. Or annoyed. The big green bitch could never seem to decide how he felt.

He ducked a missed swing, driving his sword through the zombie's neck and sighing with relief when it finally fell and crumbled. "That took too fucking long." Tommy said, trying to ignore the wheeze to his breathing. He had been out of fighting for far too long, his sword arm felt oddly numb by now, tiredness dragging his footstep. Every breath felt like a chore.

Maybe he should lie down, he thought. Let the mobs kill him. They had infinite respawns, yeah? At least spawning in that ocean meant no mobs other than errant drowned.

Unless he spawned back in his bed. And would that be terrible? He'd never leave it down, his big man image would be permanently crushed. At the rattle of bones, Tommy lifted his sword again, glaring at the skeleton waiting in the shadows.

"You're a fucking fighter, aren't you?" Tommy said, not meaning it at all. Stupid skeletons couldn't get a hint. He had been hoping that the zombie would be the one to survive, he didn't have a shield so dodging arrows would be a pin in the ass without a meat shield zombie.

"Let's fucking go then." He snapped, lunging forward. He had to stop halfway through, rolling to the side to avoid an arrow that sunk deeply into the dirt where his heart would have been. He didn't linger on it for too long, adjusting his grip on his sword as he sprang back to his feet, now closer to the skeleton than before.

"Fuck you!" He yelled, slamming his sword into their ribcage. There were already plenty of notches and grooves there, black blood smeared over bone from the zombie's brutal attack.

The skeleton crumbled a moment after and Tommy let out a whoop of triumph, standing over his fallen foe.

Who was awesome! He was! He fucking kicked their asses! No one could even touch him! He was the best fighter here, no, the best fighter that ever was! Dream and the Blade had nothing on him. He- owwww his side hurt. Tommy stopped with a shallow huff, pressing a cautious hand to his side.

It wasn't freshly bleeding but there was certainly a lot of blood, his shirt both unpleasantly damp and crusty. And he had lost the last of his watermelon. Tommy released an annoyed sigh as he turned around, wanting to get back to his cave before more mobs arrived. He'd need to collect more food in the morning. His cave was nearly done, just a block or two more and he'd have a big enough space that it wouldn't feel like the walls were closing in on him and Bird Henry-

A panicked squawk. Every nerve in his body snapped straight to attention like he had been zapped by lightning.

Across the clearing, Bird Henry was hopping across the ground. Cobwebs covered their back, pinning their wings, the silken strands dragging on the ground as the bird frantically hopped. Unable to leap back in the air.

The perpetrator was easy to see, a massive brown spider slowly creeping closer with a hiss. His mind flashed back, he had heard the scratching sound of a spider nearby. And ignored it. It must have ambushed Henry when the parrot tried to hide in the trees again.

The spider lunged. Tommy lunged as well, sword falling to the ground.

He crashed down on the spider, tackling it away before its deadly jaws could snap close on Henry. Tommy let out a choked scream, vision fading for a moment as his wounds crashed against the ground, uncushioned by the spider's hard skin.

There was a flame of pain up his arm, the spider brutally clamping its jaws shut on him. Blearily, he could see the crimson blood begin to flow against pale skin. Tommy pushed himself up, ignoring the excruciating pain from doing so, and slammed his entire weight against the spider. And then again.

The spider crumbled to code, leaving Tommy limp and shaking on the ground. Everything felt like agony, even breathing. He tried to push himself up but halfway up, his wounded arm gave out, sending him crashing back to the ground with a shrill shriek of pain.

A soft chirp. Tommy forced his head up, looking at Bird Henry through fuzzy eyes. Relievingly, his bird friend looked to be unharmed, other than being covered in cobwebs. "Ya gotta be more careful." He slurred. "Can't lose ya like I did Henry."

As if the parrot could understand him, Bird Henry hopped closer, pressing their warm feathery body against his cheek. It felt nice. Tommy let himself lean into the touch, trying to remember what he should be doing.

He had to get up. He knew that. But everything hurt so bad and where there wasn't pain, there was a lingering exhaustion. Real fucking stupid considering how much he slept lately but apparently his body could never be good to him. Tommy grimaced, trying to push himself up again before falling down with a whine.

He wanted Wilby. And Techno. And Phil. He wanted them to swoop him up and put him back in the nest and wrap up his wounds and tease him for being foolish. He wanted stories and warm blankets.

Fuck-He even wanted Grian. Or Doc, or Scar, or Stress, even fucking Xisuma. He didn't like the goddamn smothering but aching and cold on the ground, there was nothing that sounded better than not having to think for a bit. Not having to care. To be taken care of like they did before, to go back to that warm bed and nice conversations and food, prime that watermelon felt so far away now.

He just wanted- he just wanted- Tommy hiccupped, trying to push himself up again. He couldn't get distracted by that. He doubted the Hermits would let him back so easily after he had run off. He wasn't about to go crawling back and hope they had some kindness left to give him.

He had faced down a whole horde of mobs. He could totally handle anything this night could throw at him. He just had to get to the cave. The thought rang around his head like a bell and with Henry's encouraging chirps, he sat up. The command filled his head, get back to the cave. He just had to get to the cave. And then he would be safe and nothing could hurt him.

A soft hiss. Every muscle in his body froze and Henry squawked in panic, clearly recognizing the sounds. Of fucking course.

With the last of his strength, Tommy pushed himself forwards, screaming as his side wound tore open again from the frantic movement. He ignored the agony, wrapping himself around Henry as a human shield as the hiss grew louder, louder, stupid why did he drop his sword-

Nothing.

Nothing but the crackle and then the smell of gunpowder and his own heavy breathing. And footsteps. "Oh man, I hope I wasn't too late." A voice said, aching familiar and yet not. Tommy uncurled a bit, looking up.

"Are you okay?" The stranger asked. Tommy looked at them blearily, wondering why there were two of them but one voice when the mouths moved. He couldn't see their eyes, only a smear of black as his vision swung in and out like a bitch. The only thing he could really see was that the guy definitely had wolf ears. Or maybe that was the blood loss.

"Fuck you." Tommy said, the king of last words. And then he passed out.

"You're safe now kid. You're safe now."

I'm not gonna lie, I really wanted Tommy to succeed. I saw your comments and was very tempted. Unfortunately, Tommy is injured, health locked, and still recovering from being sick on top of little to no sparring practice because Dream wanted him out of practice. If he had maybe one less handicap, he would have been able to pull out a win but all at once?

Doc knew what he was doing.

In the Den of the Wolf

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings: gaslighting

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Awareness came in fits and starts. For one, what came first was an absolutely brain breaking pounding in his head. Tommy rolled over with a soft groan of pain, trying to bury his head underneath the soft pillow.

He just wanted to return to sleep and not think about his head hurting. Just go back to where the sky was nice and soft and his tongue didn't feel like someone had stuffed a sand block in there.

But once he had stirred, there was no going back. His asshole body had decided "hey! You know what will be great? Being awake? Why? I dunno! I fucking hate this! And you for waking up so early even though I'm doing this! MEH MEH MEH MEH."

Fucking stupid. Get your shit together you stupid flesh suit.

But nope, not today. Today, Tommy was blearily squinting into the darkness, debating if he had gotten another concussion and took a nap in a cave again. Not the first time it had happened and Dream had been real pissy when he missed their meeting because of it. Not his fault he didn't have a helmet and that zombie got a lucky shot in.

And it felt like it too. Not the good kind of post battle vibes when he was riding high on a strength potion and yelling to drown out the pounding in his skull. The bad kind, the one where you got the shit kicked out of you and are left to rot. There was some kind of weight over him, a heat that smothered him and felt unbearable.

He let out a sound that was halfway between a groan and a mumble, trying to awkwardly shuffle his rebellious limbs into some sort of movement. He blinked again, trying to focus his eyes before the dull throb in his head forced them to close again.

"Oh man, pup, didn't expect you up so early. You're a fighter, aren't you?" A warm hand pressed on his forehead and Tommy let out a soft mumble. Fucking wrongun touching him, he oughta- shaking his head felt like he was shaking his brains out and he quickly stopped with a low sound of pain. "Easy now, you got hit pretty hard."

He got hit? Fuck, he thought the concussion thing was one of those fucking coincidences. What fucking happened? He scoured his mind, trying to remember what had happened before and only came up with little scraps, pieces of a whole.

He wasn't on the Dream SMP. That was a big blaring neon red sign in his mind, and he could feel himself still for a moment. Dream... Dream wasn't here. Couldn't get here. Maybe. This man wasn't Dream, he wasn't any of the others. He was with the hermits now.

But. But what happened before that?

He remembered red feathers. A new friend. Digging- a mine? No, a house. Had to dig it big so he wouldn't smother under the weight of it, feel the walls crushing in on him. Groaning. Zombies. A flash of a blade and agonizing pain, a strike to the stomach, tearing in his arm as the spider bit down-

Warm hands pressed him back into the bed, preventing his sudden jerky movement, limbs striking out with no coordination but to run, get to safety. "Easy there, pup, don't go trying to get up just yet."

Tommy panted, blinking his eyes slowly open again. This time was a bit clearer, he could make out a shadowy ceiling, a smudge of brown that may or may not be a face. He could feel his breath speeding up as the hands kept him pinned.

He didn't recognize that voice. No. Wrong. He recognized the voice but he didn't know who it was. It was a weird kind of memory like something getting stuck between your teeth, frustratingly there, but you couldn't dislodge it no matter how much you tried. Scraping and scouring his brain for nothing.

He made a soft whimper, freezing as soon as the sound slipped out. Waiting for the moment of pain, the scolding, the sigh of disappointment before it came-

A warm hand slipped under his head, squeezing the back of his neck. "Hey, hey, we're all good here! No need to be like that pup, you're safe now." They said. The hand stayed but it didn't move either, didn't squeeze hard enough to send sparks across his vision or make his knees buckle.

"No-" Tommy said, sickeningly close to a whine. He struggled again, flailing against what was undoubtedly a blanket.

How was he under a blanket? A pillow to his head? The last thing he remembered was being in the jungle, on the ground, after the spider- the spider- he couldn't remember well. The fight hurt. He remembered that. There had been hissing, the slight smell of gunpowder, the omen of his fucking death. Out in an explosion like Wilbur.

And-

A voice. The hissing cut off. Someone's hands on him. Tommy forced his eyes again and this time the shape was a bit clearer, the smear of brown more like a person. They had settled next to him on the bed, leaning so close that he couldn't see the room he was in, just them. He couldn't see their eyes, hidden by a still fuzzy black area that he was pretty sure was sunglasses. Pretty sure.

Prime, this was just like before. A headache that seemed intent on eating him whole, lying in a bed in an unfamiliar room.

“Henry.” He croaked, struggling beginning to renew. Where was his parrot? He didn’t see them anywhere, oh Prime, please let it not be that it was too late, not another one, not so soon. He couldn’t- he didn’t remember them getting hurt. But could his memory be trusted? Dream had gotten annoyed at him forgetting easy facts before.

“Henry?” The stranger said. Tommy made a soft desperate sound, unable to speak through his fear. It constricted his throat, locking his voice down where he couldn’t reach it. “The parrot? He’s okay, a little startled but unhurt. You did a good job protecting him. He’s in the other room right now, I didn’t want him waking you up.”

He could stifle the audible sigh of relief. If the other wasn’t lying, at the very least Henry was okay. He didn’t know what he would do if he lost Henry.

“Gotta. Gotta stop happening like this.” Tommy said, the words slurred by his clumsy tongue. He could barely see the confused twist of their mouth before the attempted joke settled in and they chuckled, hands shaking with the noise. Oh yeah. Still got it. Tommyinnit, funniest man ever.

“Oh, I guess this is kind of familiar, yeah?” The man said, glancing around. “I wouldn’t know much about that, I wasn’t around when you were awake?”

“Awake?” The word was hard to form but he forced it out. Awake? What did that mean?

“I guess you don’t remember, makes sense that you don’t. I was one of the hermits who was keeping an eye on you while you were sick.” The man explained. “Stress was worried when your fever didn’t break so we took turns keeping an eye on you.”

Oh. That explained why his voice was so familiar then. If he really dug in deep, he could remember the man talking to him, the same soft rumble. Or was that a different memory? Was he mixing it up with the ones from before?

“Who?” Tommy slurred out. He briefly debated telling the hermit off for even implying he got sick, because no, the great Tommyinnit did not get sick. But his throat honestly felt like it was on fire. The first sentence had been a bit easier but now it felt like a struggle just pushing out one word.

Which he was not going to tell the other. Nope. Not happening. He wasn’t even going to hint at the fact he wasn’t feeling well.

“I’m Rendog, or Ren for short. I’m another one of the hermits who lives around the jungle.” Ren explained. His hand shifted and Tommy couldn’t help the spark of loss, want, as it pulled away, fading when it pressed back into his curls. “I found you when I was hiking back from a nearby cave from a mining trip. Real stroke of luck there, if I had been even a bit later or took a different route, you would have been respawning.”

“No-” The word came out forced, the slur growing worse as Tommy scrunched up his face. That didn’t seem right? Not the name thing, but the finding him thing. Something about it giggled at him, twisted and bit, but he couldn’t remember why. It stayed just out of reach.

He slumped back into the mattress, not sure of how to continue that. There was no proof, nothing to it, not even a memory to prove it wrong. But something, survival instincts that had been carved into his damn bones after all the years, told him that something was a bit fishy here, a bit mysterious one might say.

“No?” Ren repeated. Tommy stared at him, a half hearted glare. “Alright, I ain’t questioning it. How are you feeling? You were pretty out of it when I brought you back, it was a little touch and go before the potions kicked in.”

“I never die.” Tommy said, his face twisting into a painful grin. Even if it felt like someone had tossed him into a lava pool without a fire resistance potion. Ow. Top ten worst ways to wake up.

Ren chuckled again. “Can’t say you’re wrong there, you took a lot of hits before you went down. They just kept you down for a while, the sword wound and bite was nasty.” He said. He frowned. “Dunno if a respawn would have even helped much.”

“Kidding me.” Had he really gotten hurt so bad? Injuries that a respawn couldn’t really touch were rare, usually the product of targeted code deep magic. The kind of stuff that got you straight up banned from every server everywhere, the kind of stuff even anarchy servers didn’t touch (but Dream might have).

“I’m not.” Ren said, and the smile dipped for a moment, replaced with something more serious. “Xisuma didn’t tell you?”

“What?” What had he left out?

“He was pretty worried about you pup. He’s got you coded for infinite lives but you’re already health locked and a health lock makes that... delicate.” Ren hurried on when he saw Tommy’s panicked look. “You don’t have to worry about dying! Trust me, Xisuma’s good at what he does, he won’t let you die. You’ll always have infinite respawns. He’s just worried that the damage is hitting harder than it should have and making the health lock permanent.”

“Not that bad.” Tommy admitted. He tried to sit up but winced part way through as every single nerve of his body seemed to catch up at once. But honestly, it wasn’t that bad. They had hurt, yes, hurt like the nether and L’Manburg all in one. But it was still a muted kind of hurt. A bit distant. Not enough to soften it, but enough that he could notice it when he thought back now.

He knew some admins lowered the pain sensation. He was pretty sure Xisuma had mentioned something about it but he had kinda thought the other admin had lied. Lowering that stat was such a useless, pointless thing to do that most of his previous servers hadn’t bothered. You got hurt, you dealt with it yourself.

“I dunno about that pup, it was pretty bad.” Ren said, sitting back slightly. Tommy had to strangle another whimper before it slipped out, reflex and instincts nearly taking over. “You slept through three days, even when you put the time warping aside.”

Tommy stared at him in mute shock and horror, “you’re shitting me” practically written across his face. He waited for the “psyche”, the shake of the head, the laugh, but it never came. Ren was just staring at him with those same sad puppy eyes.

Three days? That was a lot of time. He had slept longer, yeah, but that was when he was sick. The injuries had been bad but not that bad. He had suffered far worse on 2b2t or even Dream SMP.

Fucking prime, just a few mobs and he was back in bed again. He glared at the ceiling, angry at himself and the mobs.

Ren continued as if he didn’t notice Tommy’s silence at all, which Tommy appreciated: “Do you think you feel well enough to sit up? I have a glass of water here for you if you’re thirsty but I don’t think you want to bathe in the water.”

Oh fuck yes. Water sounded absolutely incredible right now. He never thought he’d be so excited about drinking water. If he had a diamond for every time he got excited about drinking water, he’d have two diamonds which is not a lot but it’s weird it’s happened twice.

Tommy wheezed at the unexpected joke, reaching out to press his hands against the mattress, awkwardly trying to shuffle himself up the bed. He froze when warm hands reached out to steady him but Ren didn’t push further, only holding him for a few moments before going to readjust the pillows behind him so he was half sitting, half laying back.

“You’ll have to be a bit careful holding this.” Ren said, reaching over and grabbing a glass from a table beside the bed.

“Doesn’t everyone drink water by dumping it all over themselves? Hermits behind on the times.” Tommy said, smirking. He coughed slightly, reaching for the water. It nearly slipped out of his hand the first time, the cold condensation making it slippery to the touch and the wound on his side making it hard for him to hold the weight. But his second attempt was more successful.

The first sip of cold water washed away the sandy and dry feeling and Tommy took another gulp, sighing in bliss. Good fucking water. Contrary to the hot as the nether room, it was almost freezing cold which made it feel even better against his throat.

All too soon it was empty and Tommy couldn’t quite help the disappointment as Ren reached out to take the glass, it disappearing back into his inventory. “I’ll go get you more in a bit but right now your stomach still needs to settle.” Ren said. “Your stomach wound nearly reopened in the fight which took your healing back some. Bad luck.”

Tommy grimaced. Well, that fucking sucked majorly. Even if he could do just fine on what the hermits considered ‘serious stuff’ for some reason, it was never fun to be told that he’d have to wait longer to heal.

Now that his vision was a bit clearer, he could look around more. The room was only lit by a lantern hanging by the door, casting the rest of the room in shadow. The walls and ceiling were pale yellow. There were a few ornaments like a table on the other side of the door with a flower pot and bookshelves resting against the wall.

He glanced at Ren, taking in the hermit more carefully. Two for two, another hermit wearing an all red shirt. But unlike Grian, Ren had a leather harness slung over the shoulder, the kind Techno occasionally wore for melee that could carry easy to grab potions and a weapon. Most interestingly were the wolf ears which flickered and twitched under Tommy's gaze.

"Have you not seen a lot of wolf hybrids before?" Ren asked. Tommy jolted, face warming a bit when he realized Ren had caught him staring.

He waved a hand. "I've seen other hybrids, not wolf hybrids though." He said. Did Fundy count as similar? Foxes were related to wolves, yeah? Or was that Tubbo fucking with him again? "My nep-, uh one of the people who live on my server is a fox hybrid."

He wasn't quite sure how to describe Fundy. Before the war for independence and the elections, he would have laughed a bit but called him his nephew because that was what they were. But then the flag had burned and Fundy had stayed and Wilbur-

Tommy and him hadn't talked in a while. The other was probably too intimidated by him being a big man and all. That was fine.

"Oh that is pretty similar." Oh, so he was right! He knew it. "Some differences, don't listen to Doc when he says it makes me dramatic, he is lying. Mostly I get some neat ears and instincts, except around the full moon."

Tommy squinted at him. "You telling me your a fucking werewolf?" He said, half expecting the other to start laughing. The only werewolves he had ever heard about were from Techno's myth collection or whatever and that asshole had laughed at him when he asked if werewolves were real.

Instead, Ren reddened. "Not really? Yes but also no?" He said. Tommy stared at him.

"Illuminating. Makes perfect sense to me, big man. Yes and no on the werewolf thing."

"A long story short, I am code wise, a wolf hybrid who shapeshifts." Ren said. He rubbed his hands together, glancing away. The ears pinned back. "Just in the beginning the werewolf thing was a lot less 'goofy dog' and a lot more 'oh god it's trying to eat me'."

"That's shit man, sorry about that." Tommy said, trying for sympathy. And succeeding with how Ren rewarded him with a bright smile.

"Honestly, it's not that bad now, Xisuma fixed the coding so it runs a lot smoother and so I decided to keep going through it, just with a lot more me at that time. The hermits were a huge help in working through any lingering nerves too. Next full moon is in a month, maybe you can swing around. I'm a whiz at catch."

“I doubt I’ll still be around by then.” Tommy said with a snort. Either Xisuma would get intimidated by his bigmanness and kick him or the glitch would be fixed. Possibly a combination of both.

“Hm.” Ren said only that wasn’t a very good translation for it at all. It was more of a rumble, something that smacked a button in the back of his brain that said “oh shit we fucked up”. Finally tuned by the Blade himself. Disappointment and frustration rolled into one convenient package that made him squirm under those dark sunglasses.

“What happened when I was asleep?” He asked. And why was he still here?

He wasn’t expecting to be abandoned out in the woods or something, okay, maybe a little. But Doc had told him he could leave and he kinda thought that would cut the ties a little. That after him leaving the hermits would consider whatever kept them offering him healing potions and food done.

And yet here he was, in the base of a hermit that had only met him when he was asleep, sleeping off his pain again. Weirdchamp.

“Like I said, it was a bit touch and go for a few hours. You got hurt pretty badly by the mobs and I had to call Stress and Doc when it looked like that sword wound was getting infected.” At Tommy’s confused look, Ren explained, “The weapons mobs carry tend to be coded slightly differently. Not much of a problem unless you’re on a server that likes hyper realism because player code is pretty well protected but because your coding is glitched and your health is low, the corruption possibility was a lot higher.”

“Ya gotta be kidding me.” Tommy said, letting his head thump back against the pillow. It always seemed to come back to the glitch. He couldn’t escape it. Couldn’t leave the server, couldn’t access part of the server still, and now his health didn’t even work right. “Fan-fucking-tastic.”

“Language.” Ren said. He rested his chin in his hands, wolf ears flickering. “Luckily you didn’t get infected but you’ll need to drink health potions for the next few days to make sure. I’ve been keeping an eye on you while you slept but that’s about it. Oh, and Scar visited.”

“Scar?” Tommy repeated curiously. He hadn’t expected Scar to visit.

“Scar was pretty worried, he came by when I brought you in, when you were still asleep.” Ren said. “He felt really bad about what happened, I think he blames himself for you being out there.”

“Why?” Tommy mumbled slowly. It hadn’t been Scar’s fault at all. Doc had made the offer and Tommy had jumped on it. He didn’t know why the other would blame himself for something that was so clearly Tommy’s fault.

Ren shrugged. “He thinks he should have given you more supplies or insisted that you started out borrowing one of the houses in his village first so you’d at least have a place to stay at night. You getting hurt makes him feel like there’s more he could have done to keep you safe.”

“That’s dumb.” Tommy insisted, looking down at his hands. But despite that, he couldn’t help but feel a little kernel of warmth. No one had ever seemed to care about that before.

“He likes you.” Ren said simply. As if that all made sense, made it come back together easily. “And he didn’t want you hurt. He only left because some of the other hermits worried about his own health getting worse because he was stressing himself out.”

Huh. And wasn’t that odd to hear. He hadn’t even known you could hurt yourself by getting worried about others. It sounded fantastical, almost unbelievable. Dream and Phil had complained about Tommy giving them gray hairs at some point but he knew now that was out of annoyance. Not out of concern.

“Speaking of which, you do need to drink your health potion as well. Do you feel up to it?” Ren asked. “You have to drink it soon but if your stomach isn’t feeling great, we can wait just a bit longer.”

“Now’s fine, I guess.” Tommy said, rolling his eyes a bit. He couldn’t believe how weirdly obsessed the hermits were with making him drink potions even when he was fine. Like Ren even admitted that he was healthy! Why keep making him drink them. “Go ahead, I guess. Hit me, big man.”

A potion bottle fell into Ren’s hand with a flash. Freshly made too, like all the hermit potions he had seen so far. How the fuck did they have all this time on their hands? He still couldn’t quite believe that they just... had a ton of fresh potions. Constantly. No war to disrupt the material gathering or theft of potions.

Fuck even he had engaged in some good old sabotage. It’s good for the growing teenager! And here the hermits were casually pulling out fresh potions like it was no big deal. Absolutely fucking bizarre. Bunch of rich ones, he guessed.

At least from what he could remember, fresh potions tasted better. Tommy accepted the bottle with a grimace, making Ren laugh. “Not a fan of the taste either?” He said.

“The taste isn’t a fan of me. It’s out to get me man.” Tommy said, making him laugh harder. He popped the stopper out of the bottle, taking a cautious sniff. No off smells or discoloration. After a moment, he choked it back and grimaced as the taste immediately hit his tongue. Not even the freshness could quite disguise the overly sweet taste of health and regen potions. At least it wasn’t the sickly sweet of fruit gone rancid as he had unfortunately discovered was the taste of old potions during the war for independence.

“I probably should have waited to give you the water until afterwards so that you could wash the taste out of your mouth.” Ren said, accepting the bottle back. He tossed it back into his inventory in a flash of light. “But I can get you some food in a bit.”

“Not needed, my man.” Tommy said, pushing himself so he was sitting up instead of laying back. There was a building tingle in his veins, the sign of a successful potion. Already, his side and stomach felt a bit better. He wasn’t going to sit around and make the other wait on him hand and foot or whatever. He was a good guy like that. “I can be out of your house and out the door after I get Henry.”

A warm hand landed on his chest, a growl making him freeze. “You’re not going anywhere.”

And as he looked into those dark sunglasses, Tommy wondered if he had fucked up.

Chapter End Notes

Henry is alive! But all is not well.

Messages Good and Bad

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: minor panic attack

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“No- I-! No!” Tommy said, choking, tripping over his words. They slipped out stuttering and wrong, his clumsy voice completely unable to shape what he wanted to say when faced with those dark eyes. “Fuck you! Fuck you fuck you-“

A sharp growl that hit that panic button just right in his brain and Tommy froze, locking up. “No swearing.” Ren said with a sigh. “I know it’s hard to adjust to but you can’t keep swearing like that.”

“You can’t-“ Tommy forced himself to focus, forcing his voice to come out right. “You can’t keep me here. You can’t.”

He had been free. And maybe he hadn’t been very good at it, maybe he had gotten hurt a bit, but surely that didn’t require prison? Surely that didn’t require whatever hell Dream put him through? He hadn’t touched anything, Ren said so! The other wouldn’t have even found him unless they had walked back at the right time and the right way!

We’re they mad about him nearly respawning back there? Or the waste of potions. Tommy could feel his breathing begin to speed up, stupid lungs deciding that now was the time to kick it into high gear. No other time than this to see how fast these babies could breathe, no sir, gotta break the record you know.

He let out a shrill sound, halfway between a whimper and a swear, trying to push past Ren’s hand. “You can’t just keep me here.”

But he knows he’s wrong- it’ll be so so easy for him to disappear here. Nobody had looked for him in exile after a month and that was his Allie’s. His friends. Why would any of them hermits look for him? He’s be cold and alone and scared again and again and again gods no please-

His breathing stuttered as fire warm arms pulled him into a warm chest, claws coming through his hair. “Ah pup, don’t be like that.” Ren whispers into his curls. “Follow my breathing, chill out, ain’t nothing gonna hurt you here. Not with me around.”

That was the problem though. Tommy made another incoherent sound, he’s like to think it was rage but a little voice whispered the truth, that it was just fear. Fear and pleading for someone to help.

Pleading for Ren to help.

And for some stupid, Paving or whatever response, his breathing started to ease. It was all too easy to fill the rhythm of the other's steady breathing, his own beginning to match tempo and wasn't that so fucking stupid? That he was getting used to following another's breathing?

Gods, he hoped Techno never found out about this. He would never let him live this down. The teasing would be merciless.

"There we go pup. You're doing great." And it almost makes Tommy a little sick, the way pride rises up at that. His own mind betraying him.

Ren was betraying him. Taking away his hard earned freedom that he had begged and wheedled for. Possibly planning to hurt him, why he had no clue, but it wouldn't be the first time someone had hurt him because they were jealous of his absolute manliness.

"Feeling better now?" And for a moment, Tommy just lets it hang there. No answer. Let the world spin by for a moment to think about it.

No, he wasn't feeling better (lie). He was sitting practically in Ren's lap. If anyone could see him right now, he'd have to kill them out of sheer embarrassment. Fuck, he wasn't even sure if Ren could live. None could know about this.

And that wasn't even touching the massive ravager in the room. That he couldn't leave.

He was a good fighter. One of the best honestly. People built shrines to his battle prowess, and begged him to teach them how to fight. But Ren was strong, and had almost effortlessly held him down with one hand. Was holding him tight now, barely noticing how Tommy wriggled and twisting in his grip.

If it came down to a fight for freedom, he wasn't sure who would win. And that's before Xisuma came into it because the admin would probably be pissed if he attacked one of their players.

"I was feeling better before some wrongun decided to hold me captive." Tommy snapped, bristling at the soft snort of laughter. Ren should not be finding this funny right now! He should be mad!

"I'm not holding you captive." Ren said and Tommy twists around in his grip so he can glare at him, one eyebrow raised like the boss he is.

"What the fuck do you call this then? Telling me I can't leave?" Tommy said, his voice beginning to climb steadily louder. Because really, what kind of fast one was Ren trying to pull here? He wasn't a fucking moron, he knew something fishy was up here and Ren had even come out and say it. How could he pretend like that means nothing.

"I talked to Doc. He said that your being left alone was contingent on you being able to take care of yourself and stay out of harm's way." Ren said, voice aggravating smooth and even. "But can you really call this staying out of harm's way?"

“I was doing fine!” Tommy yelled, bristling. “I had those mobs on the fucking ropes!”

“If I had gotten there a few seconds later, that creeper would have killed you.” Tommy froze.

He knew, he really did, that dying meant respawning. Unless Xisuma had lied to him, he should come back again.

But there was still that bone deep terror inside him that whispered “one life left and then you’re gone”.

Ren ignored his panic, or maybe he noticed it and decided to press forward anyways: “And even if you had survived that, infection was almost guaranteed to set in. You had an open wound made by a zombie sword that was coated in rotten flesh and mud. A spider bite on your arm. A head injury. That’s not staying out of harms way. That’s diving headfirst into harm.”

“And now you want to go back out. No health potions, no fresh bandages, no rest. Not even a house because I saw that cave you were building and it’s nowhere near livable, especially when you still had open wounds.”

“I don’t need health potions.” Tommy said, stuttering a bit over the words. “I’m fine, you already gave me plenty.”

His injuries were painful, yeah, but way more healed. He might have to shred his shirt or part of his pants legs, but he could make enough bandages to hold him through the long and slow process of healing.

Prime, did he miss when he had a chest full of fabric and thread. Most of it had been gone before exile, used for uniforms and patches and long since burnt flags. And this time, there was no cheery big brother helping him gather more. Ghostbur kept promising some of Friend’s wool but he never remembered and eventually Tommy had stopped asking.

It’s not a big deal. It’s not like he missed when all he had to do was make puppy dog eyes and all the fabric he could want would be delivered to him. Not a big deal at all.

And he had bigger problems than bandages right now. Ren had gone slowly, deadly silent.

“Pup.” He said, a just barely hidden growl edging his words. The arms tightened around him and Tommy refused to acknowledge that he had squeaked. Just a little. “You’re still bleeding. I can smell it.”

“It’s not that bad.” Tommy repeated, trying to push away. But his moves were weaker now, a little more reluctant.

There was something so achingly familiar about this. Being brought into a warm, soft nest, an annoyed chuff answering his every protest. Calmer comments shooting down every reason he put forward until he finally settled down in warm arms and let his (former) family smother him.

Ren's growls weren't the same, they weren't the squealing chide of Techno's chuffs. Or the sibilant hiss of Wilbur's voice. Not even Phil's quiet coos.

But they still hit the memory. The memory of being taken care of, being wanted. Of being able to relax, knowing he was safe and that someone would guard him.

Memories that had disappeared in gunpowder and unfinished symphonies, wither skulls and burned wings.

Tommy couldn't breathe. Ren leaned in close, so close he could almost see the wolf's eyes behind their dark shades. "You would have died. Slowly and painfully. The health lock was almost guaranteed to become permanent."

"I wouldn't have died." Tommy protested but his mind was already spinning through the horrific possibilities. Dream had gotten mad at him before when he hurt himself, telling him that attention seeking wasn't good. That if he crippled himself, it would be all his fault. "I wouldn't."

Ren sighed, leaning back. "Maybe you wouldn't have." He agreed and the other sounded strangely tired. "Maybe you would have pulled through and there would have been no consequences. But it would have been slow and bloody and you don't deserve to go through that alone."

There it was again. You don't deserve it. Tommy bared his teeth, and he could help the strangely hysterical laugh that bubbled up. "Maybe I do deserve it."

After all, who would say he wouldn't? Even his own family had thought he had deserved exile and that was for burning part of George's house. He had thrown the hermits' kindness back in their faces, breaking their stupid no swearing rule hundred of times, and gotten his dumb ass nearly killed by mobs.

If this was back on 2b2t or Dream SMP, he would have been left to deal with or saved with an eye roll.

But Ren didn't roll his eyes. "You don't."

Another hysterical snort. "And how do you know that?" Tommy challenged.

"Because I didn't." And that got Tommy to still. "I died before, bloody and alone. And I didn't deserve that. And I know you didn't deserve it too, because there are very few people who deserve that kind of thing and you are not one of them. For all your barking, you have never once hurt one of us and that makes you okay in my book."

Tommy's breath caught in his throat, unable to comprehend that second part. Instead, he settled on facing the first. "Did the hermits really--"

It seemed impossible honestly. Ren wasn't the Dreamslayer, yeah, but he was strong and had clearly seen a lot of fights judging by the faint scars on his arms. He didn't seem like the kind of person who lost a fight, even if he was kind of goofy.

And even without that, the other hermits had been so vehement about healing him. Smothering. Was that a lie? Did they really leave Ren to die slowly?

Ren spluttered, the motion jarring Tommy. “No!” He said. “Gods no, are you kidding me? I’d get an earful from everyone if I tried to hide being hurt or sick. There’s no way Xisuma wouldn’t notice my health dropping like that. No, it was long before Hermitcraft.”

“Before?” Tommy flushed at Ren’s look. He defended himself: “I never heard of you off Hermitcraft.”

Grian, he knew, had left before though it was brief. Scar had mentioned living somewhere else too and yeah it had been implied that others had lived elsewhere before but there was still this image in his mind that the hermits had always been in Hermitcraft. The rumors swirling in 2b2t had spoken of grand worlds, the kind no one wanted to leave, and the hermits had gone hand in hand with that. Other than the rare story or Comm video from competitions, no one really saw them leave. No one ever seemed to know where they came from either. No one talked about knowing them before their server.

What was that like? To live somewhere for so long that no one remembered who you were before? How long until he became Tommy of Dream SMP and not Tommy of Business Bay or that kid from 2b2t?

“Yeah, I lived on another server before. Terrible one really and I don’t regret leaving.” Ren said, resting his chin on Tommy’s head. It was oddly comfortable, but annoying to be reminded the other was holding him like a baby. “It was my near death that made me take Xisuma’s offer, even after I dealt with the ones who left me, I wanted someplace safe to live. A pack who cared.”

“Oh yeah, you fucking killed those people. “Dealt with them” was just a posh way of saying “those people don’t exist anymore. Holy shit. That’s some big man stuff.” Tommy said. He would love to kill people, Dream for one.

Ren wheezed, shaking with the force of it. “That’s for me to know and you to maybe one day find out.” He said. “You’re kind of young to hear that story.”

“Ey! I’ve been through war, big man! You can tell me stories about how you killed people. Did you turn into a wolf? Please tell me you turned into a wolf, wolf murders are pog.” Tommy said, trying to wriggle around so he could see Ren clearer. “Or did you spawn trap them?”

“I didn’t spawn trap them, but wolves may have been involved and that’s all you’re getting out of me.” Ren said. He paused. “Unless you want to tell me about that war you went through.”

Tommy scrunched up his face. What about it? Fighting in the war for independence was big man stuff yeah and he knew he was cool, but he’d rather hear about cool hermit history. Tubbo would absolutely flip if he came back with stories right from the hermits. “Not much to say big man, someone was being a dick and we fought about it. People died.” He died.

Less fun to think about especially because Dream was a nasty little cheater that second time. “Not much to write home about.”

“You know, it’s stuff like that that makes us concerned about you.” Ren said. Tommy made a confused noise and was answered with a soft rumble that seemed to vibrate through his spine. He slumped back, instinct telling him to settle down, that he was safe. The rumble grew deeper, louder and Tommy sighed quietly, blinking quickly to stop his eyelids from dipping shut. In the warm and dark room, it was all too easy to let himself be lulled by the soft rumbles.

It took real effort to force himself back up, back to the real world. “Dunno why, just a bit of war. Sure you’ve had it worse.” Tommy said, the words coming out a bit slow and muddled.

But it was true, innit? The hermits were whispered about for a reason. Grian had killed Dream, their admin had defeated anyone encroaching on their server, and there were a million little whispers and the occasional video of the hermits during incredible things on test servers.

Surely they had a little war, yeah? Maybe not tnt, because that had been soundly turned down, but he couldn’t believe that this server was 100% peaceful all the time. It was impossible. Not even Dream SMP had made it more than a few weeks before fighting started to break out, beginning with Dream stealing his discs. Fucker.

“Before, maybe. Most of us had bad servers that had wars. And I think that makes us more worried because we know how bad it can get, we’ve been through the bad times, and so we worry about you who’s used to it.” Ren said. Tommy’s breath stuck in his throat unable to speak. “Servers shouldn’t have war. Prank wars maybe, or little fights where everyone is roleplaying and they all go home friends. But real wars? Where alliances break and so do the people in them? That’s wrong. And you don’t deserve that pup.”

That was... he wasn’t even going to think about it. “You roleplay wars? Weirdchamp, man. What’s next, roleplaying an entire tv show?”

“You laugh but yeah, we do a lot of role playing here.” Ren said. Tommy turned and stared at him, confused. “It’s fun! Each season, you can pick a character and play as them and theme all your builds! Right now, I’m doing some lore about an old science fiction series I loved. When you’re doing better, I can show you around my base.”

“Oh prime. Is this going to be Scar’s base all over again? Absolutely fucking fussy and ridiculous? This room is already pretty fucking ridiculous. It has interior decorating. Decorating. Who the fuck has interior decorations?” Tommy said scowling. Ren looked completely off guard. “Chests. Furnace. Crafting table. Flower pot if you’re feeling like a big man. Who the fuck needs more than that?”

Ren stared at him. “Most people?” He said. “I mean, obviously, I don’t do interior design for everything at least not in one go because it takes a while, but? Bookshelves and a table seem pretty basic to me?”

Tommy stared at Ren, hoping his eyes were transmitting the full force of his derision. “Books and a table.” He said, his voice dripping with feral rage. “What the fuck do you even need a table for?”

“...eating food?”

“Eat on the fucking floor like a normal person.”

That finally got Ren to break, wheezing laughter. Tommy flinched as the other pressed their face into his curls but slowly relaxed again when he realized he wasn’t in trouble. “Eat on the floor.” Ren wheezed. “Why are you eating on the floor?”

“Why are you eating on the table? Checkmate. I win.” Tommy shot back. Building a table had been absolutely pointless. The only one who had a table in L’manburg was Wilbur and that was because he was a fucking prick who liked having a table to write on. Desk. Whatever. Who needed that? Couldn’t catch the great Tommyinnit using tables, he was too much of a big man for that. Tables cramped his style. Tables were for the uncool who couldn’t just write on the floor like a cool person would.

“That doesn’t even make sense.” Ren said, still wheezing. “You gotta stop eating on the floor though if you don’t want Stress to fuss at you about it. She says it’s not healthy.”

“That’s dumb. What’s not healthy about eating on the floor?” Tommy replied. “Haven’t you tried?”

“You could get dirt in your food? Or sand? I don’t know if you noticed, but I live in the desert. The sand gets everywhere already.” He briefly released Tommy to wave a hand around the room. “I sweep and all but somehow, it never makes a dent. Scary stuff.”

...if Ren said this house was built out of sandstone, he was going to lose his mind/ Who the fuck mined sand for hours to make sandstone? Why couldn’t these fuckers be normal and see the greatness that was cobblestone and dirt?

“Wil says a little sand in your diet is good for you.” Tommy said with a perfectly straight face. He was just going to gloss over that sandstone thing for now, or at least work up to a really good yell later.

He had tried it a few times but never really got into it. It was crunchy, yeah, but he wasn’t a fan of the way it stuck around in his mouth for hours after. Wilbur said that was part of the fun part but he thought the other was crazy.

“No, no it’s not.” Ren said, making a horrified growly noise. “Why would anyone tell you to eat sand? What kind of monster tells a pup to eat sand?”

Oh he fucking did not.

Tommy would have taken a chunk out of Ren’s arm if the other’s grip didn’t tighten in time, holding him back. “Don’t call my brother a monster, you wrongun.” Tommy growled. Only he got to insult Wilbur’s stupid face and stupider ideas.

“Shoot, shoot, I’m sorry.” Ren said, twisting so Tommy’s face was pointed away from him so the other couldn’t start gnawing through his arm like he deserved. “I shouldn’t have said that.”

“Yeah. You shouldn’t have.” Tommy growled, looking down at the colorful blankets.

Wilbur hadn’t been a monster. He hadn’t been. Monsters didn’t tuck you in at night or call people sunshine or wrap them up in warm hugs. They weren’t big brothers or fathers. They weren’t- They weren’t- Monsters weren’t supposed to die.

“So. Sand. Do you still eat that?” Ren tried. Tommy refused to answer, staring down at the blanket. The other wasn’t going to get anything out of him. No a single damn thing. He could just be there and languish in his lack of Tommy time because he wasn’t going to grant him any of it. That fucking asshole.

The blankets were dark green, he noticed, trying to block out the murmur of Ren’s voice. Cactus dye most likely, not surprising if they really were in the desert. He was pretty sure they were, with the oppressive dry heat of the room. Dark green wasn’t his favorite color, not even close, but it wasn’t too bad. At least it wasn’t an inferior color like lime green.

They were soft too. Oft in the way the bed from before was, that came with real crafting, not magic. Did the hermits do this for all their beds? How did they find the time? He used to have time to sew, but that was before the wars, before exile reduced the last of his sewing kit to a smoldering crater. And not just that but to find good wool for it.

A growl. Tommy shifted, focusing harder on the blankets. What kind of stitch were they using? He couldn’t make out the hems from here, stuck in Ren’s lap still, but clearly whoever did this had some skill, they-

Ren rumbled.

Tommy instantly went boneless, caught completely off guard. The loud rumble seemed to vibrate the air around him, teasing out all the stress in his bones. It wasn’t the right kind of rumble, too deep, but it was close enough. Close enough to remember a nether hot nest and safety.

It cut short all too soon. Tommy couldn’t quite stop a whine from slipping out and he flushed red in humiliation. “Oh, don’t be like that pup, I can keep going later.” Ren said. “Just needed o get your head back here with me so we can talk.”

“I don’t want to talk to you.” Tommy said, glaring down at the blankets. Ren had called his brother a monster. He didn’t deserve to be graced with his presence.

“What if I gave you an apology gift?” Ren bargained. Tommy stiffened, considering. He liked free shit. Liked it even more when he could guilt people into it because that meant there were no strings attached. “A way to say sorry for hurting your feelings?”

“It’d have to be pretty fucking good.” Tommy said, not feeling guilty in the slightest. He was a dirty crime boy, it was practically his job to scam people. If Ren wanted to be scammed

then he would scam him.

“I know the perfect gift.” Ren said. He shifted, something falling into his hand in a flash of light. “Scar brought this by earlier, said Xisuma had finished working on it for now and you could have it back. Am I forgiven?”

A familiar object laid in his hand, dull metal gleaming. A communicator, easily recognizable by the smeared red paint and stickers.

Tommy beamed when he saw it. “You’re on probation.” He said, eagerly snatching it up. His comm! Prime, he had missed it so much. It sucked not being able to access any of the comm mechanics or even the chat. He ignored the other features for now, flipping straight to the channels marked Dream SMP. He probably had so many missed messages by now, everyone going crazy over his disappearance-

No new messages

Chapter End Notes

Ren? Distracting Tommy from his new captivity? Definitely not! Just happy, healthy bonding here folks.

Working Towards Peace

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Mental breakdown, gaslighting, mild toxic masculinity (Tommy thinks guys can't cry)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy stared at the Comm, hand tightening around it until his knuckles turned white. No new messages. Nothing. Not a single thing. He didn't have access to the active in server channel anymore, the channel freezing on the moment he glitched out of the world, but all of his personal channels should still work, yeah?

When somebody left a server, even if it was a glitch or a kick or a ban, the in server chat stopped updating but the personal one didn't. You could- you could still message them. He had seen it before after leaving SMP Earth. Even when the texts from Business Bay slowly dwindled to a stop, Tommy being too busy to reply to keep the conversation going, they still messaged him. Even Techno, Phil, and Wilbur had privately messaged him after they left.

But they didn't now? Not a single message? He glitched out of the goddamn server after nobody had visited him for months and nobody cared? Not a single 'are you okay' or 'where did you go'? Not even a tiny little update on what the others were doing?

Even in exile he got the occasional private message. Not often, and usually they were a bland brush off to him message spamming others, but they still replied. Dream had gotten him to stop after a while, saying the message spamming was distracting Tubbo but Tubbo had still responded. Bland responses that reeked of exhaustion and never turned into actual conversations but he still responded!

He thought Tubbo would always respond. Even if it took a little bit. Even if they could talk much because Tubbo was the big shot president now who had no time for the friend he exiled.

But that was message spamming. He just fell out of the prime damned server. And not a single person asked him if he was okay?

Even Dream hadn't messaged him and Dream was supposed to be his best friend.

"Kid?" Tommy sniffled, bringing up his free hand to roughly scrub at his face, wiping the wetness away. He wasn't crying. Sand had invaded his eyes and his body was breaking out the defense systems. Big men shouldn't cry. Not in front of cool people who didn't cry either. "Ah, pup."

It's didn't effect him. It didn't. He didn't care that no one, not even his best friend or family had texted. He didn't. He was fine. He was fine.

He wasn't fine.

Gentle hands wrapped around his own and Tommy let out a soft whine, practically toppling back into Ren's chest. He sobbed, uncaring of the way the Comm fell to the bed or how his tears stained Ren's shirt.

Ren shifted, moving so his arms were wrapped around Tommy, pulling him into a warm hug. "What's wrong?" He asked.

"N-nobody messaged." Tommy said, hiccuping part way through. He pressed his face into Ren's shirt, his breath hitching with sobs. It felt like the entire world was crushing in on him. Like all the stress and pain of the past few days had been magnified and contained within this one single moment. "Not a single prime damn one of them messaged me after I glitched out. It's all fucking empty."

He looked up at Ren, eyes wide and desperate. "Does the server block out of server messages?" He asked, scrambling for some kind of better answer. It could make sense. Hermitcraft was known for rarely interacting with the world outside the server. It made sense that they might block messages to do so, especially for new players like him.

But Ren slowly shook their head. "No, Xisuma doesn't block messages usually." He said slowly as if Tommy was made of glass and one wrong move, one wrong word, could shatter him. "Most of us have out of server contacts or the occasional competition to keep up with. I think a few block them when they're working on a complicated build but Xisuma wouldn't really do it himself unless he had a very good reason."

"But then-" He couldn't continue, the words choked in his throat.

As soon as he stopped speaking, the sons returned in earnest until he was practically shaking with the force of them. Ren made a soft sound, pulling him closer. "Oh, pup, I'm so sorry." He said. "Maybe it's a mistake? Or a glitch?"

Tommy hiccuped. "Do you think so?" He said, not hiding the childish interest in his voice.

Could being glitched out of a server really affect private messages from being sent? He didn't know that much about specific player glitches so it could be totally possible that could happen. Maybe they had messaged and he just couldn't see it because the glitches prevented them from being sent through. Maybe they did care.

But when he looked up, Ren's face was awkward. Shut off, almost in pain. He knew that face well, back from the golden days of the early server. The face of someone who was trying to lie and not very good at hiding it. It was enough to startle him out of his tears, the sobs slowly, achingly slowly drifting to a near stop.

"Of course, it makes perfect sense!" Ren said, and if Tommy focused he could hear the slightly strained note to his voice. "Glitches can mess with player code so of course they

could somehow effect the Comm messages! I don't see why they couldn't prevent messages from being sent through."

Tommy narrowed his eyes, grip tightening slightly. "Have you seen one?" He said, demanding but his voice broke halfway through. He needed to know. He wasn't going to be kept quiet with easy stories and platitudes. If they hated him, if Dream was right nobody cared, if even Dream didn't care, he wanted to know.

Ren froze, ears drooping. "No." He admitted after a long moment. "But that doesn't mean it's not possible! I'm sure that it could happen."

He paused, not continuing. The pained face lingered. "But?" Tommy prompted. He didn't want the soft story, not right now. "Fucking tell me dude, I can handle it."

This time the ears dropped far enough they practically disappeared into Ren's hair. "Xisuma probably would have fixed it." He admitted slowly. "He had your comm and was working on it, if there were any errors there, he probably would have fixed it or told me."

There's a weird schism to grief. Sometimes it wrings all the tears out of you, turns the faucets, and you find yourself choking on the sobs. The sadness is enough to fill an ocean.

But other times, it's quiet. A silence following the tears, an empty nothingness where emotion could be. But it's not peaceful. It's not fucking cathartic or whatever people say. It aches in the bone deep knowledge that whatever has just happened has wounded you so deeply that even the tears can't escape, frozen in the moment.

Tommy felt like that now, his gaze falling to his lap. So they really hadn't messaged him after he left. No one had sent him leave and thought they could even give him so much as a measly goodbye. Not his friend. Not his former family. No one. It was like he had never even known them.

Had it all really meant nothing to them? The promises that they would always be family, love and care from three unlikely people? That he and Tubbo would never let the world tear them apart, made in a distant ravine as two sides tried to split them? The people he met, the sacrifices he made, none of that warranted even one message of concern?

He wanted to yell and scream and hit and kick. He wanted to sob and cry and bury his face into a blanket and let it all wash out. Break the world instead of it breaking him. Instead he stared at the blanket. It had little cactuses embroidered into it, he noticed dimly. With little sunglasses.

It's funny how with his world caving in, all he could think about were those little cactuses.

He didn't move as Ren pulled him closer, limp and unresisting as a doll. Ren rested his head on Tommy's hair with a soft sigh. He was rumbling again and the sound made Tommy's heart heal and then break a little further. "I shouldn't have told you that." He said quietly. "Might have been kinder to let you believe that it was a glitch."

“I would have fucking killed you when I found out.” Tommy answered but it lacked the usual fire to the threat. He would have though. If Ren had strung him along with false promises that he later found out were all lies? Kept in the dark about these small betrayal just a little bit longer? He didn’t give a fuck how terrifying the hermits were in the stories, he would have buried his sword in their heart.

“But you would have been happier for a while longer.” Ren said and Tommy felt his breath hitch again. Because he did kind of want that. He did want to go back to when he didnt have his comm or when he thought it was a glitch, back to a world where he could pretend Dream’s more insidious words were lies. That Techno had visited for a short bit to laugh but it had come from concern. That Philza was so busy with other things that he couldn’t check on his youngest but that he still loved him. That L’Manburg was working its hardest and were just a little bit too busy and that at the end of it all, people cared.

He wanted that.

Slowly tears begin to slip down his face. Not the full sobs from before, but little trickles finally breaking through the dam. He made a soft whine and Ren rumbled back.

“I would have fucking killed you.” He repeated. Because what else could he say? That he waned to forget this betrayal? Thank you for being willing to risk your life so i can be happy? Fuck.

It was just too much.

A chime.

He froze.

Was that Ren’s comm? But the other didn’t move. His gaze went to the side where his comm still laid, half covered by blanket. He nearly headbutted the blanket trying to grab it, Ren having to dodge an elbow to the nose as he did. His hand closed around cool metal and he could see the dim glow of the screen against his fingers. A message.

Had one of them noticed? Was the previous silence just a bit of a delay? Would he see an apology, a message of concern, fuck, he’d even take them mocking him right now. He wouldn’t care about being the joke for once if it got someone to care enough to message him. Surely at least Jack would want to laugh at him, right? Stupid Tommy, accidentally glitching himself out of the server. What an idiot!

He’d even take Dream messaging him by now.

He flipped it upright, clicking through the screen to messages. All channels but one were still grayed. And the one lit up was a name he knew.

But not one of the Dream SMP players.

Grian: How are you doing? Are you ok? Shashwammy said you’ll be getting your comm back soon so now when can message each other.

He stared at the message, mind not so blissfully blank. Because if he thought about this, if he thought about the message he just received, it would mean having the truth hit at once. That they really didn't care. That it wasn't because of a glitch or distraction because if it was, then why did Grian tell him? Grian who had much cooler things to do than message him like fighting dragons or whatever.

That this was real and true and happening. That he had glitched into another server and that not a single one of his friends had thought to message him.

Why didn't. Why didn't they message him? Dream had been lying when he said that they were his only friend. Tubbo and the rest were still his friends, even if they were a bit busy. But was that really true? Ranboo had visited, even if only for a little while and in secret. Techno had shown up to laugh at him. Tubbo and Philza never came. Even Ghostbur disappeared. Only Dream had come to the party, talking about delivered invitations and people who might, just might, care too little for him.

"He had to be lying." Tommy said, staring at the comm. "The fucker was always trying to get in my head."

Dream couldn't have been right. He couldn't have been. He didn't want to believe it.

"Who? Grian? Because I don't think parrot boy would lie to you." Ren said. He could feel the shift behind him and part of him wanted to cover the screen so Ren wouldn't know the truth. That he was such a terrible person that no one on his old server had wanted to message him, that even a guy he had just met had messaged him before they did. "I think he really does want to know if you're okay, Mambo and to stop him from racing over here when he heard you got hurt."

Tommy burst into tears again.

"Not him then." Ren said with a quiet sigh. Tommy continued to sob, unheeding as he was slowly pushed around, until his feet hit a warm sandy floor and he was forced to stand. Well, stand as in he was on his feet but half draped over Ren's shoulder. He clung to the comm, not letting it fall. He whined as the sudden movement jarred his stomach.

"Sorry." Ren apologized. "You're a bit too tall for me to carry you but I don't think it's a good idea for you to be in bed right now. The bed has bad vibes. Really rotten vibes, the kind that ruins the room."

That got his tears to slow so he could stare at Ren in confusion. Ren didn't look back, carefully half carrying and half pushing him forward. "Shouldn't be too terrible to have you up for a bit, not if you don't start trying to sprint or jump. Just don't tell Doc, hey? Don't want him scolding me for this. Doc scoldings are the worst kind of scoldings, he just talks slowly in that deep voice of his and you start thinking maybe your next base should be at bedrock level."

"What?" Tommy croaked. His eyes felt wet and sore but they were good enough to see that the door was coming closer. Ren gently shifted his grip, pushing the door open. Why was Ren taking him somewhere? And where were they going?

“Good to see your back with me pup.” Ren said, smiling at him. “We’re just going to go outside for a bit. You’re okay with that, right? I can take you to see your new parrot friend and show you some more of my base. Best way to fix the blues is looking at a cool build and my build is one of the coolest.”

“What?” Tommy repeated again, his mind slow to catch up with what was happening. As soon as it did, he started to struggle, trying to dig in his heels. “No!”

Ren had to catch him before he fell to the floor, and Tommy let out a yelp of pain as the other’s hand briefly touched his stomach. “Pup, you can’t do that! You could hurt yourself.” Ren said. Tommy shook his head frantically, pushing back with his weight until he was practically sitting on the floor.

“No.” He repeated, trying to shift backwards. “No, no no no-“

“Hey, hey, I get it kid, alright? We’re not moving anymore. You can sit right there for as long as you want. But can you take a deep breath for me?” Ren asked. Tommy took a shaky deep breath, balling his hands in his shirt. This felt. This felt wrong. “That’s good. You’re doing so good for me kid. Can you tell me why you started panicking?”

Tommy glanced away, looking at the floor instead of Ren’s sunglasses. A gentle hand grabbed his chin, tilting it back so he was forced to look at Ren. “I can’t do anything if you don’t tell me what’s wrong.” Ren repeated. “I need you to talk to me, pup. Can you do that for me?”

“You’ll get in trouble if you take me out.” Tommy mumbled. Ren had said Doc would be angry if the other took him outside. And if Doc got angry then he would get mad at Ren and then he would get mad at Tommy for getting in trouble and Ren would get mad at Tommy for not being good and causing trouble.

Because it was always his fault if he didn’t stop someone else from getting in trouble. First, it was Wilbur and prime how he had tried to stop the spiral that began in that ravine. His sweet older brother turning into someone who screamed instead of sang and blamed him for not seeing a double cross no one could have seen coming. Techno. Ranboo. He had a way of always fucking up and dealing with the mess.

And fuck, he didn’t even know if his old server noticed him missing, he couldn’t get kicked out of this one. Not when he was certain Dream wouldn’t help him, not when he was now doubting all the other admin friends he had made. Had Boffy just been humoring him? Scott? Josh?

What would happen to Ren too? How much trouble would the other be in? He didn’t think the hermits did exile, not when they lived so far apart, but maybe they did? Or maybe Doc could find another way of getting revenge.

“I don’t- You don’t deserve that, you don’t even have armor-“ Tommy babbled. Then again armor couldn’t guard against tnt or a lot of withers. Ren had been nice, kind of a bastard and a wrongun but nice and he even fumbled at him and didn’t make fun of him for crying like a baby. He didn’t want to see the other hurt.

“Tommy.” Ren said. And his voice was so terribly soft. The wolf hybrid knelt in front of him, holding him by the shoulders. “What do you think Doc will do to me if he finds out I broke his rules and took you on a short walk outside?”

“He’ll hurt you? Punish you, yeah. Because you broke the rules and that’s how it goes, innit?” Tommy said, folding his arms and wincing as his hand brushed over his side. “You said he’ll get mad at you if you do this.”

Ren sighed and for a moment, Tommy was certain he had done something terribly wrong. Said the wrong thing, maybe Ren was like Wilbur and didn’t like his ideas being challenged even if they were kind of fucking stupid? Or Dream, he never seemed to know what to say to Dream some days. Some days everything was wrong and all answers led to pain and ashes. Ren raised a hand and Tommy flinched back, certain they’d hurt him for mouthing off.

Instead Ren’s hand settled in his hair, softly ruffling it. “Pup, you don’t have to be afraid of me, it’s silly to think I would hit you..” He said calmly. “And Doc would never hurt me.”

“You said he would be mad though.” Tommy said. When people got mad, other people usually got hurt. That was the way the world worked.

“He’ll be mad but he’s not going to hurt me. He’d never do that! All he’ll do is lock me in his base or something until he’s satisfied I won’t get myself killed by doing something stupid.” Ren said. “And he’ll lecture me a lot. Like, a lot. You would think he’s got some Merling blood in there with home much he can talk when he’s lecturing.”

Tommy stared at him, wondering how the other thought he was stupid enough to fall for that. Who the fuck thought a lecture and some house arrest was a punishment? That had to be a fucking lie.

“Look, see, I call him.” Ren said, grabbing his Comm. He leaned back, blocking Tommy’s attempts to stop him. He tapped on the screen a few times before pausing. “Hey, Doc!”

“What.” Came the familiar rumble. Tommy froze.

“I’m take Tommy on a walk around outside, he’s getting kind of antsy and I think a little adventure will clear his head.” Ren said with a chuckle. Tommy stared at him in horror, bracing himself for the rage.

“You must be joking.” Doc said, dry as the sand around them. “Do you really think it’s a good idea to take him around your base with those wounds still healing? No, you do. I’m coming over there and I’m going to drag you back to my base by your tail because clearly you can’t be trusted to protect yourself-“

A click. Ren smirked, lowering the Comm. “See? Just a little bit mad. No danger.” He said. He glanced at the Comm before shrugging. “Probably going to regret that but oh well. Maybe I can help him on his base for a bit or work on my next design.”

“Oh.” Tommy said, staring at the ground. Now he felt kind of stupid, kicking up a fuss when there was no problem. He had really thought for a moment there that Ren was going to be

punished.

Because that didn't sound like a punishment. It kind of sounded like something Phil used to do, though back then he never left their house anyways. The other would put on the disappointed look and lecture him on why it was a bad idea and how he wasn't leaving the nest for a month.

One time Wilbur had ended up grounded to the nest too when he tried to sneak Tommy out to take him exploring. Phil had fussed a lot about that, loudly declaring them unable to take care of themselves. Techno had been just as bad but less talkative of about it, half of his escape attempts got foiled by the other lurking around the nest like a creeper.

"I'm glad you felt like you had to defend me though, it's cute." Ren said, smirking. Tommy bared at him, making a rough growl that made the other laugh. With fear, totally. That was a terrified laugh if he had ever heard one. "Do you still want to go out or do you want to go back to bed?"

Tommy chewed his bottom lip, thinking. "I want to go out." He said after a long moment. He was tired of being cooped up and he wanted to see Henry and get a chance to see another hermit base. How many more chances would he have to see them?

How long until Xisuma fixed his code? It couldn't be that long, it had been quite a while already.

Even so, he still resisted a bit when Ren pulled him back up. Dragged his feet a little as they begun to walk. Something in his mind whispered this was a trap. Like the days Dream would push and nudge until he snapped and then deny it all and burn his stuff for snapping back. Or ask something so totally innocuous and tnt for the wrong answer. Like when Philza asked if he saw him as a father figure and Tommy said no as a joke.

"Are you sure you're fine?" Ren asked, pausing. "Like I said, we can go back to bed. I can show you videos or something, you don't have to go out."

"I'm fine." Tommy said, taking a deep breath. He repeated it again to try and make it true. "I'm fine."

Ren looked doubtful but didn't ask again. Instead he carefully nudged a door open. "Welcome to the valley of Tatooren."

"WHAT THE FUCK--"

Chapter End Notes

Tommy is Not Having A Good Time. Maybe he'll feel better after seeing Henry and Ren's base.

(Also yeah, Xisuma totally would block messages or leave a glitch unfixed if he had a good reason to do so. Nope. What are those reasons? Not relevant.)

Valley of Tatooren

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings: Guilt as manipulation, touch starvation

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The weirdest part was on first glance, he actually thought, “huh, this isn’t so bad”.

Because at first glance, he just saw a few buildings that mostly looked to be made from sandstone, sand, and maybe a few other materials he couldn’t pick out. Which was nice. Normal even! It actually kind of reminds him of his builds back home, his little home carved out of a dirt.

There were a lot of buildings, definitely too many for one person, because he remembered most hermits lived alone? That’s why they were called hermits, right? Scar had had a lot of buildings too. But the sun baking down on him told him he was probably in a desert biome so yeah, sand and sandstone was just lying around everywhere, maybe the guy had just molded a few sand dunes.

That he could accept. That he could find normal. Maybe the dude got bored sometimes and built kind of elaborate sand huts. Because unfairly, the damn things had to somehow be even cooler than his dirt hut which made absolutely no sense. How could a sand hut look cooler than a dirt hut? Dirt wasn’t cobblestone but it wasn’t that bad. But somehow, Ren’s looked better.

Fine. Whatever. Maybe they had cool redstone farms like he had seen in a few videos or held storage space. That would be okay. He could accept that.

He could not fucking expect the massive dark brown mansion that loomed in the distance, hulking and glaringly obvious. At first he thought it was another base, but no, there looked to be a well traversed path through the sand area to it. And fucking what?

Who lived in sand huts when they built a goddamn mansion? Ren apparently.

It was massive. It was clearly elaborate. It had clearly taken hours of materials and resources gathering and at least half of those materials didn’t look like they came close by. It easily dwarfed most of the sand buildings.

And that would have been enough, but somehow, IT GOT WORSE.

Because in another direction, was a giant tower of black stone. This was even grander, eerie orange light spilling out of the front. Two black spires crowned the top of the build, an orange

beacon in between them. And around the building was a biome that took him right back to his 2b2t days, dark stone dotted with lakes and rivers of lava.

If Scar's village had been taken out of a fantasy storybook, one of those whimsical ones Phil liked reading to him, this ominous tower was straight out of Techno's collection. Something forboding and seeped with a dark history. It looked like they kind of tower for someone who kicked cows and blew up towns.

And the sheer, mind boggling scale.

If the mansion had dwarfed the village, this dwarfed even that. Forget hours, maybe days of resource collection and building, this had to take weeks. "Is that fucking all blackstone?" Tommy said spluttering.

It couldn't be, right? No one would be that stupid. Blackstone looked cool, not as cool as cobblestone, but it was pretty up there. But it was a massive pain in the ass to collect. It and the brick version only really appeared in a few places, the dangerous bastions in the nether and that one fucking biome he could never remember the name of. Basalt something or the other? Maybe?

The amount to collect to create a biome out of blackstone... Forget Scar's village, this was an absolute goddamn nightmare and he could not believe it to be true.

Maybe it had been coded in? Xisuma seemed like a bit of a pushover when it came to player requests. Ren could have bugged him a bit about adding in some modded biomes. That would make more sense. It was easy to add some mods to a server, Tommy had even hacked a few in to get a boost during his early days.

Even the wastes of 2b2t were constructed mostly from hacks and creative mode. No one would ever be insane enough to go out and collect all that material to build a custom biome. It made no sense. Who would be that insane?

"Of course! Had to get the right atmosphere, you know? The old sci fi theme I was working with really needed a volcanic pop to it, and the tower really set it off but something was missing and I realized a biome theme would be great!" Ren said cheerily like that was a normal thing to say.

Ren. Ren would be that insane.

Tommy made a noise like a dying creeper. "Why?" He babbled, waving a hand towards the absolutely fucking massive tower and the apparently custom biome. "Why would you- what is the fucking point?"

Total, this had to be weeks of work, if not months. Between the town, the mansion, the villainous tower, the goddamn crazy biome. What was the point? Why do this? The hermits maybe, honestly he still didn't quite believe it, didn't wage war all the time.

But didn't they change worlds occasionally? He was pretty sure he had heard them talking about at least one server change, because apparently they got bored. But why build all of this

and abandon it for a new world where you had nothing? Why build a badass tower and live in a sand hut?

Ren hummed, apparently unbothered by Tommy's incredulous tone. "Because I enjoy it?" He said. "I always wanted to do an elaborate science fiction themed build! So this server, I built a plot line around science fiction and of course I had to build corresponding settings! It took a while, but I'm really happy with how it's turning out."

Right, because that was a perfectly normal thing to say. "I built a massive goddamn tower for the fun of it! Let's just built a sand town too! And a mansion and a custom biome because why not?"

Like Tommy was a complete moron for not putting the pieces together. Scar had been the same way, treating it like it was such a normal thing, the idea of building just for fun.

Prime, what was with these hermits? Who built just for... for the fun of it? You built walls to keep others out, you built a house to have space to store your shit and sleep, you built a farm to get food so you didn't starve. But this, towers, and mansions, and villages, and fancy little details... all for fun? Wasn't it boring? Wasn't it all technically useless? Even one sand house was enough to store everything Tommy had ever owned.

What was that like, some traitorous part of his mind whispered, to have the time and freedom to build for the fun of it? To build towers of cobblestone that reached the sky, not just for intimidation, but for the pure joy of building and building until he couldn't anymore? Not for war, not to survive, just because it was fun.

Ren ignored Tommy's mental struggle, continuing: "It's still unfinished, there's a lot more details I still need to add and a few tweaks to make. I also want to see about building another sand dome for my village because I might need to expand my storage system but that's still up in the air."

Tommy wheezed. "And I thought Scar's village was bad." He mumbled. That had been tiny compared to this, still terrifyingly intricate, but it at least seemed a bit more reasonably sized.

"You know that's not his main base, right?"

What.

Ren wheezed, so hard Tommy almost fell to the floor before Ren steadied himself. Laugh it up, Tommy thought balefully, as soon as his limbs weren't frozen in confusion and definitely not there terror, he'd destroy him. Absolute knock out.

"You have to be fucking joking me." Tommy snapped instead. That village had been huge and terrifyingly intricate and it wasn't Scar's base? Yeah, right. What, did he have a little cottage somewhere else or something? "Playing a prank on the new guy is pretty unpog of you."

Ren shook his head quickly, a wide smile spreading across his face. "I'm serious, the village is one of his and definitely one of his favorite builds. He does all of his trading and farming

there. But his mega build is in a completely different place. And it is way bigger than the village.”

And that was-

Huh.

Part of him was horrified at the latter part. The village wasn't quite as big as all this, but it had still been absolutely massive. It had likely taken a long time of resource gathering and building and to think that it was even the main build? Absolutely insane.

But the other part of him, that loathsome part he hated, had latched into the first part with terrifying fervor. Because why didn't Scar show him his main base? Did he not trust him, no matter his insistence that he did? Did he think he was going to cause that much trouble? The words lingered on his tongue, choking him but refusing to come out. He startled when he looked up and realized Ren was still looking at him, waiting on his reply.

“Oh, uh, huh.” Tommy said, flushing at how he tripped over his words. “That's, uh, neat. He didn't show me his mega build.”

He could have kicked himself as soon as he said it. What a whiny thing to say. It wasn't like Scar's village hadn't been absolutely Pog.

“Oh did I say something wrong?” Ren said, his face creasing with a frown. “Ah, man, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to imply that Scar didn't want to show you his base.”

“No, fuck that, I know you didn't say that.” Tommy rushed to explain, not wanting to see that frown any longer. It wasn't fair of him to blame Ren like that. “It's not like you knew or anything.”

“I should have picked my words better.” Ren said, looking so earnestly sorry that Tommy fumbled his words slightly. “Seriously, Scar really does want to show you his mega base. He was talking about it when we met, saying how disappointed he was that you didn't get to see it.”

“Then why didn't he?” Tommy said, folding his arms and then immediately unfolding them because wow that fucking hurt. “What fucking stopped him?”

Ren awkwardly glanced away. “Well, uh, you chose to leave. So his planned tour kinda got cut short earlier than he wanted. He had planned to show you a lot more.”

Oh. Fuck. He forgot about that. Tommy glanced down at the ground, frowning. That kind of made him look silly for worrying Scar didn't like him. Because it was his own fault, wasn't it? He was the one who had chosen to leave while they argued, who took Doc's offer. It made sense Scar hadn't been able to show him his mega build. He had left before the other even could.

And here he was, with the remnants of anger still simmering in his chest with nowhere to go.

Fuck. Was Scar mad at him? He wouldn't blame him if he was. That would piss Tommy off, someone leaving when he had an epic tour planned for them and unbidden, he remembered a party only attended by two and winced. Yeah, he would definitely be mad. Would it hurt to ask?

Ren was kind of a weirdo, especially when he first woke up, but he didn't seem dangerous. Kind of harmless, actually? He was nice. Ish. Tommy couldn't quite forget how the other had gotten annoyed when he brought up leaving. But he did want to know before he got a sword through his back.

"Is he pissed at me then?" Tommy said bluntly. Ren coughed, looking shocked.

"Mad? Why would he be mad? I think he was kind of disappointed, but he said you could always finish the tour later." Ren said, shaking his head. "He was more worried you got hurt."

"I'll make sure to finish that then. Won it fair and square too." Tommy said. That was still a bit of a rush, winning against a hermit in a contest, even if it was an eating one.

Surely, he'd have enough time for a tour.

"Mega build?" Tommy asks, glancing around again. He had heard the word a couple times in relation to the Hermits but he kind of thought it was like a group thing maybe. That the fabulous builds in the stories were either creative mode or a group project and after a few years, he had leaned more towards creative mode or hacks. Group projects never worked out. Even he, the great and amazing Tommy Innit, was a lone wolf.

Ren hummed, gently easing him down another step. Tommy could help the slight warmth that spread across his face at the warm feeling of hands on his shoulders, not pushing him forward, but ever so gently guiding. A firm pressure that promised to catch him when he stumbled.

They lingered as he was slowly nudged into sitting down. Halfway down, Tommy's knee buckled but instead of a jarring and painful hit, firm hands held him by the shoulders, keeping him suspended as he got his feet back under him and could sit down.

He both hated it and loved it in equal measure. Hated it because he was a big man and here he was being treated as something fragile, something could break if he so much as sat down too hard. He had gone through war, crime, exile, so much worse than a few cuts and burns. He was a big man who didn't need any help.

And yet craved it because how long had it been since he had been treated like that? Like something that needed to be wrapped in a blanket? Like someone to be protected?

When he first woke up, he had been repulsed, angry that they were touching him even as he craved it. But it was like the longer he was here, the more it grew... nicer. The days going by with no hits and no pain, just gentle touches.

It almost makes the thought of leaving hurt. Just a little bit. Because when will he ever get this again?

Once they're both sitting, Ren speaks. "A mega build is basically a hermit's major project for the season." He explained. "We don't always finish them and sometimes we don't build one at all and work on other projects, but it's basically it's usually the biggest build we make on a server? I dunno, they don't really have a set size but like... one hundred blocks minimum?"

Tommy choked.

"One hundred blocks?" He said, and his voice definitely didn't crack a bit at that. He looked at the tower again and yeah, that and the biome were definitely huge, even bigger when you threw the village and town into it. He couldn't even see the edges beyond the biome, or much more than the faint hint of forest by the mansion.

"It's actually not that bad when you think about it! A lot of time they're more like smaller builds connected together." Ren said like that made it any better. Tommy made a choked noise, slumping over, not quite comprehending the scale of that. "Like, as you might have noticed, my little town here, the tower, all of it would be considered a mega build if you put it together."

He was sitting in a megabuild. Prime, that was... huh. Kind of mind boggling to be honest. Because yeah, on some level, he knew this place was huge. But it was the absolutely normalcy Ren had in his voice. That mega builds were a real actual thing, that the stories and screenshots weren't creative mode, that elusive magic, they were real.

The Prime Path was probably a hundred blocks, if you included the space around it. L'Manburg might have counted, maybe? Both had been beautiful to him. But that was still nowhere near the same scale as this. And even then, in both projects, he had help. Tommy made another choked sound, feeling a gentle patting on his back as Ren stared down at him with amusement and worry.

"What's the point?" He said after a long moment. He just... still couldn't quite comprehend. Of building to that scale, by yourself, in survival, just for fun. No other reason.

"Because why not?" Ren said. The patting slowed and he could hear the gentle thump of Ren's tail against the ground. "Don't you have something you like to build for the fun of it?"

"Cobblestone towers." Tommy admits. He waits, hackles up, waiting for the mocking snort. The comment of cobblestone towers being ugly, something weird to do. But they weren't, they were the poggest thing ever, and everyone had had so little taste for not liking them.

But Ren just shrugs, still smiling. "Towers are cool." He said, a note of approval to his voice. "Maybe when you're back on your feet, we can find you a nice spot to put a few towers down, I know a few empty spots that nobody took."

Tommy shook his hand. "All good, big man, but I don't really need to build." He said. He just needed a small place for now, by the time he was healed, the glitch would probably be fixed. And then he would be heading back to his own server.

He couldn't see Ren's gaze behind his sunglasses, completely missing the dark look that briefly flashed by. Maybe if he had noticed, he wouldn't have cared. He had seen it far too many times before.

"It'll be fine, I dare say this server could use a few more towers." Ren said. "Xisuma won't get mad at you for building."

Tommy rolled his eyes. That was easy for him to say. The fucker built a mega build for kicks and giggles.

"Seriously." Ren said like he could hear Tommy's thoughts. Or maybe the fucker had just seen the eye roll. "Build whatever you like, I'm through with most of my major season projects so I can even help you out if you need it."

"Maybe." Tommy said, shrugging at Ren's slightly disappointed face and trying to shrug off the flare of disappointment in his chest. It wasn't a bad thing to not want to build right now! He didn't need to do that, he needed to focus on getting back home and after that, maybe see if he could carry a few items back with him. "I dunno, big man, kind of busy with other stuff."

"Oh. Yeah. If you don't want to, that's alright. Just, the offer is open if you want it." Ren said, ducking his head slightly to study the sand around their feet. The disappointment in his chest felt like an anvil weighing him down. He tried to shove it away but it lingered, refusing to leave him entirely.

It was fine. It was okay. Ren probably only wanted to help him build because he was a building obsessed maniac. He didn't actually care about Tommy building here or not.

Tell that to the disappointed look on his face, something whispered in the back of his mind, building something would make you and him happy.

But that wasn't what he needed to focus on right now. He needed to focus on the big stuff, getting better tools and materials.

He heard the hermits were rich in totems and Diamond a plenty. If he could get his hands on even some of those, or gather his own, that would be enough for him to turn the tables on Dream. He'd like to see the fucker lording his power over them when Tommy was the one fully kitted out again.

He opened his inventory with a flash, checking it briefly. Most of his stuff was still there, but his iron sword was missing now. Fuck, he'd have to replace that soon. "Is there a good mining area around here? I need to get a new sword."

To his shock and frustration, Ren shook his head, beginning to climb to his feet. "I don't think going mining is a good idea right now." He said. "We can talk about you maybe getting a new sword later but not right now."

"Are you kidding me?" Tommy said, throwing his hands up. "I can at least hobble down into a mine and slam a pickaxe into a wall! That's not that hard! I need a fucking sword, dude!"

Ren's ears dropped, pinning back until they almost vanished into his hair. "You're completely safe from mobs here, there's nothing you need a sword against. Unless." Ren paused, looking so wounded that Tommy flinched back slightly. "Do you really think we would hurt you?"

"Not you specifically but..." Tommy said, scrambling slightly for the words as he was caught on his back foot. How was he supposed to explain this?

A small voice told him that maybe Ren was right, born from the heartbroken gaze of the other. He had his fists and in depth knowledge and mastery of martial arts. None of the hermits had tried to hurt him.

But another voice screamed that the hermits were weird. Scary, that they had so much more power in this situation. If they wanted to hurt him they could very easily do so and no one wouldn't know what had happened to him.

Ren sighed, rubbing a hand against his face. "We'll talk about it." He said. "If it's that important for you feeling safe. But I really don't think it's safe for you to try mining, you're already injured and can't really run if you need to."

"I'd be fine." Tommy mumbled. But he didn't argue as Ren gently pulled him to his feet and started pulling him back towards the nearby buildings. This one looked kind of like an igloo, if someone had gone insane and built an igloo out of sand. "This isn't over."

Maybe he could give it a day. Just so he wouldn't have to see the heart wrenching sadness on Ren's face. He could afford to show a little trust, a little. It's not like he didn't still have an axe with him. He could still defend himself.

Tomorrow, he'd go mining. It shouldn't take too long to work his way up to iron, he had gotten good at speed mining during exile. Dream couldn't be around to defend him every night but he was around frequently enough that Tommy had a lot of wooden tools most of the time.

"Let's go see your bird." Ren said. Tommy perked up, thoughts jumping to Bird Henry. He had missed the parrot. "I got him set up in a nice little bird enclosure inside, parrots aren't really meant for the desert."

"Is he okay?" Tommy said. "Does he have enough water? Melon seeds? He likes melon seeds, the fucker went through so many when we first met."

Ren chuckled. "I think he's doing okay, but I'm pretty sure he misses his owner. He seemed a little down in the dumps when I saw him last."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Tommy said, forcing himself to limp a little faster forward. Bird Henry was waiting for him and the thought was enough to have an excited little flutter appear in his chest.

Ren carefully adjusted his grip on Tommy's shoulder, pushing the door in front of them open. "Just off to the side room. I didn't want it too far away." He said, guiding Tommy down the

opposite side of the hallway. They didn't go far before Ren turned right, into another room, smaller than the bedroom Tommy woke up in.

"Henry!" Tommy said, beaming as his eyes landed on a familiar red bird. He took a step forward before freezing. Perched on a familiar armored hand.

"Xisuma? What are you doing here?"

Chapter End Notes

Tommy's 'something's up' compass has been very messed up by years of possessive families and then exile.

But by the gods, he knows an insane build when he sees one. Survivalist meet people who build cities for fun.

Consequences of Mistakes Made

Chapter Notes

Guys, this is gonna be kind of a darker chapter. Very heavy on emotional manipulation, victim blaming to some extent (hermits kind of push Tommy to think it's his fault he got injured because he choose to leave), and (platonic! We don't do romantic stuff here, that is never an option) non consensual touching. The hermits push Tommy into revealing some stuff he's very much not comfortable revealing. Some references to past trauma from Dream and 2b2t.

If you're not a fan of that, I highly suggest skipping to the end to read the last few paragraphs. I'll be summarizing the chapter in the end note.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy's breath stutters in his chest at the sight of the masked admin. It wasn't the same, not the same at all, you couldn't see Dream's face at all, count even see his head after he started wearing his chest plate and hood up all the time. Xisuma's mask was dark, but there was, there was still a window to see his eyes, dimly through the dark glass, the mask shape was all wrong, it was metal and not perfect porcelain and yet- and yet.

He was so close to Henry. The bird was practically nesting in his hands, completely trusting as it nibbled on wheat seeds. Uncaring that with what move, it would be dead. And he couldn't move fast enough to stop it. Just like Mushroom Henry.

Was he mad? Had Tommy done something wrong?

Subconsciously, he eased back slightly until Ren was in front of him. Not hiding, no. The awesome Tommy Innit never hid from anything. Just making a tactical retreat.

His new position meant he was unable to see the flare of smug pride in Ren's eyes when the other realized Tommy was half hiding behind him. He stood up a bit straighter, shifting his stance so Tommy was more behind him.

"Everything alright, Xisuma? Normally you message ahead." He asked. The admin glanced up at them, straightening up as they nodded.

"I do. I was planning to message ahead but I got quite the annoyed message from Doc." Xisuma said. Tommy flinched unconsciously. Was he in trouble? "Tommy is supposed to be resting right now."

"Pup was going stir crazy after a panic attack so I decided showing him my build would be better then leaving him in bed. He's perfectly fine and I was about to get him settled in the aviary." Ren defended. "I can take care of pups."

Something in Tommy frothed at the nickname, wanting to yell at Ren that he wasn't a pup. But mute terror made his voice stick in his throat, a humiliating weight in his chest. Henry was right there.

"I'm not- I'm not a pup." He mumbled, lacking a lot of his usual heat. Ren only rumbled in reply.

"I know you do." Xisuma said. He shifted and Tommy nearly slumped over from the wave of relief that hit as the other lifted their hand up towards an elaborate tree display.

If this was any other time, he would be all over it. Like everything else here, the aviary room was ridiculously over the top and elaborate. The room was lined with miniature jungle flora, the leaves and branches carefully trimmed to make perches. Soft green carpet was laid over the floor and even the roof was made of glass instead of sand so the room was filled with natural light.

A palace fit for the most perfect parrot ever.

How long has it taken to make this? Did Ren keep birds of his own? This had to take hours of careful arranging. Tommy chewed his lip for a moment before shrugging mentally and tuning back into the conversation. Ren built a massive tower out of blackstone, he was definitely crazy enough to speed run a room like this.

"And you know I wouldn't doubt your ability." Xisuma continued. Ten's shoulders slumped a bit even as Tommy tensed up as the admin moved closer. "I want to examine Tommy to see how the code fixes are progressing and to check for any possible corruptions. And to extend my apologies."

"Apologies?" Tommy said, bristling. Was Xisuma really going to apologize to Ren for Tommy being here in front of him? That was a real asshole move, a real Dream move if he did say so himself.

"Yes." It took everything in Tommy's power not to look weak as Xisuma's hand pressed to his shoulder, the other's forehead pressing to his own. "I should have adjusted the mob spawn rates around you to be safer. Your injuries are my fault and as an admin, I want to say sorry for the injuries caused that night."

"Are you calling me weak?" Tommy said, puffing up and glaring. And trying to ignore the tingly warmth spreading from where the other touched him because no, this wasn't nice, and his stupid body needed to shut up and stop relaxing. "I'm not some baby that needs to be set in easy mode."

He hadn't been on a single easy server in his life. Most hadn't used hardcore rules, but none had gone the route of suppressing mob spawns. It was practical. Made you tough.

"You're injured." Xisuma replied. "You had only a few tools and not even a place to sleep. If it wasn't for Ren encountering you, you could have been forced into a respawning. It is not weak to acknowledge that sometimes, help is needed. As an admin, my duty is to protect players. I should have prioritized that over your request to be left alone."

“I was fine.” Tommy insisted. It was his choice to go out there alone. If it hadn’t been for that dumb spider, he would have seen the creeper sneaking up on him. “I don’t need you to protect me.”

“We will disagree there.” Xisuma said coolly, lifting his head. “I’ll need to examine you though, to check your code.”

Tommy froze. “I thought you said you only needed my Comm to check my player stats.” He said, eyes flickering around the room. “Can’t you do the fancy admin thing without me?”

It was one thing to have someone looking at his code from a distance. It was quite another to let someone mess with his code in front of him. He couldn’t put his finger on it but the second was just incredibly weird somehow.

Personal code wasn’t really shown much, at least from what Tommy knew? It was like your DNA or whatever. Made you who you were.

The hermits had been nice but it was still terrifying. To show something so personal. One click, and Xisuma could see all of his memories. All of his deaths.

“Normally, yes.” Xisuma said and Tommy pressed further into Ren, taking a bit of comfort from the other staying by his side. “But due to your injuries caused by your trip out, I’ll need to check you to ensure your personal code is fine and unfortunately, admin abilities are limited in remote aspects there.”

“It’ll be fine, pup.” Ren said, ruffling his curls. “Remember what I said about the possibilities of damage from infection? Xisuma just wants to make sure everything is healing right and nothing is contaminating your code.”

“Right.” Xisuma agreed, the familiar glow of code around his armored hands. “The spider and zombie wounds you sustained could have an adverse effect, not just on your health lock, but on the glitches as well. The effects could range from a permanent poison effect to zombification.”

Prime, the mere thought of glitching even more made him want to vomit. He could deal with a health lock like a boss but more glitches?

He had gotten poisoned before and he’d only wish the gut churning agonizing pain of your health slowly slipping away on his worst enemies like Dream or Schlatt. The entire process had sucked and it had taken forever before he stopped carrying milk buckets into the mines.

The Wilbur from before refused to let him work with the poison potions, citing the likelihood of him accidentally breaking them. Which was unfair but fuck it, he hated them anyways.

He didn’t know anything about zombification outside of some modded rumors, but it didn’t sound very fun either.

But neither did letting someone rifle around with his code, in front of his eyes. Tommy shifted uneasily on his feet, glancing between Xisuma, Ren, and the door.

“Aren’t you fixing the glitches anyways?” Tommy said, chewing on his lip. “That was the whole point of me staying, yeah? So you could fix them? Why do you need to check me right now?”

Xisuma sighed like a disappointed parent. “I should correct myself, I don’t mean glitches just as in your personal glitched state becoming worse. I’m referring to player code changes. I can fix the glitch that kicked you between servers and corrupts your player stats, but fixing a personal code glitch like poisoning, zombification, or so on requires a personal touch.”

Oh ugh. The consequences of his actions. He hated those.

“And what if I say no?” Tommy asked warily. It didn’t sound like those glitches would affect him leaving and rejoining another server. He could get someone else to fix them or learn to live with them if they were cool enough.

Being a zombie sounded kind of cool. Not the grunting and dumb part because Tommy innit was far too smart for that, but the biting was neat. He liked biting people.

He froze as Ren’s arm wrapped around his shoulders, pulling him forward. “You really can’t.” The wolf hybrid said, ignoring how he started to wriggle. “These kinds of glitches can be serious, you can’t just take a rain check on examining them. Xisuma will be careful, you don’t have to worry about that.”

“Fuck that, I can say I don’t want him to!” Tommy said, digging his nails into Ren’s arm. If he noticed, he didn’t show any signs of it. He threw himself backwards, trying to push by Ren’s arm.

“Just let him show you it’ll be okay.” Ren insisted, holding him tighter. Tommy scowled, trying to force his way past.

Instead, with a Yelp, his injured side seared with pain, making one of his legs buckle and taking him down to the floor. Ren followed him down, one arm pulling him into the other before he could smack his head on the floor.

Xisuma knelt in front of him and Tommy made an incoherent noise of rage as the other reached out to him. “I’ll be careful.” Xisuma promised. “I’m not going to do anything to your code and it won’t hurt at all. I just want to see if you’re alright.”

“Fuck off!” Tommy yelled, trying to twist away, but the only thing he got for that was pain searing across his stomach and arm as torn skin pulled taut. His breath came short as he stared at Xisuma’s hands with wide eyes.

But Xisuma didn’t listen, hands gently pressing against his chest. Unlike before, his hands were practically freezing, colder than the void itself. It seemed to suck out all the warmth from Tommy’s skin.

He was still speaking, for the definitions of speaking. A stumbling mix of curse words and panicked whines, barely coherent enough to make a protest.

He just wanted the other to stop, wanted them to move away, give him some space. Tommy's eyes flickered around for an escape route but found nothing. His awkward position meant he was trapped between the two hermits, and all of his movements had his body threatening to declare war on his sense of pain.

There was a loud squawk and Xisuma suddenly pulled away. Tommy let out a sigh of relief. And then promptly retracted that sense of relief because oh fuck, that was Henry. A little red blur fluttered around Xisuma's head, screeching and diving in to show off his claws.

His heart felt like it was about to explode, it was thudding so hard against his ribs. "Henry, no!" Tommy yelled, trying to push himself up to defend his little bird.

Parrots weren't built to be combat animals. They were so so fragile and Xisuma was in armor and probably had like a gazillion epic weapons or something. At least an axe. In a fight, there would only be one winner.

But there was his terrifyingly brave pet, ducking and swooping like it could fight Xisuma all on its own. Xisuma just tilted his head, watching the bird's angry attacks.

"Please don't hurt him." Tommy pleaded, remembering a cold porcelain mask, a pair of fire red eyes. "Don't, I'll call him off, you don't have to do anything to him."

Even as he moved, he was terrifyingly aware that Xisuma could kill Henry before he could stop them. He was fast, yeah, the fastest man ever, but he didn't know if his iron ax could break Xisuma's armor. Even if it did, Ren could kill Henry first because of the insult.

Not another. Please. He had already lost so many of his beloved pets. He just wanted to keep this one.

But Henry wasn't listening and was Xisuma relaxing or was he tensing up to swing? He couldn't tell and the suspense was agonizing.

But Xisuma didn't swing.

Instead he moved forward, ignoring Henry's furious squawks to cup the back of Tommy's neck. Tommy look at him with wide eyes that were filled with fear. "I would never hurt your pet, Tommy." Xisuma said. "Even if they were attacking me. Why would you think I would do that?"

"Others would." Tommy challenged, tense and ready to intercept any hits. Henry cawed again, settling on a nearby tree branch, ready and waiting to strike. If he could just get close enough, he could activate the sit code, but Henry was just out of reach of the command.

"I wouldn't." Xisuma said firmly. "And neither would Ren. And neither would any of the hermits here. We don't kill pets here, especially for trying to defend their owners. I wouldn't hurt Henry."

"Your parrot is perfectly safe, even if it is having a tantrum." Ren agreed, shifting his grip slightly.

But Tommy didn't relax, glaring at them both. He almost wished he could believe it but he couldn't. Too many times, people had told him his pets would be safe. And too many times, they hadn't been.

Dream would have killed Henry for that little tantrum, even if Henry was just trying to protect Tommy.

Xisuma sighed. "We can talk through that later if you would like." He said. "But right now, I do need to check you over. Would you prefer that we move back to your room?"

"You're not getting me to a secondary location." Tommy snapped. He hadn't forgot that the hermits goal was to look at his personal coding which was extra creepy in his expert opinion. His personal coding was fine, no glitches here, nuh uh.

"If we don't move, I'll need to run the freeze command on Henry then." Xisuma said, his voice slow and calm. Tommy was anything but calm as he stared at the other.

"You can't do that." He said, but it was a weak denial. Xisuma was an admin. There was nothing saying that he couldn't and Tommy didn't even have his hack clients here.

"Tommy, if Henry keeps throwing a tantrum, he could hurt himself. My armor is hard and if he doesn't break a claw trying to scratch me, one miscalculated swoop could have him heart a branch and dislocate something." Xisuma said. He moved his hands to his lap, the dark glass of his mask staring at Tommy. "And that's not counting the harm he could do to you if he accidentally contaminated your code. If we remain here, I'll have to insist that he is perched away from us."

Tommy glanced between Henry and Xisuma. Could Henry get hurt like they said? It sounded convincing enough.

And did he even have a choice either way? Without a hack client, it would be hard for him to override an admin command. Not impossible, but hard, especially with the admin checking his personal code.

Tommy sucked in a quick breath. Whatever kept Henry happy and safe. "Different room." He said.

"Okay." Xisuma said, standing up slowly. Tommy hissed out a breath as Ren gently pulled him to his feet. He had to take a moment to steady himself, he couldn't feel any fresh blood from his injuries, but they were definitely making themselves known.

Gritting his teeth, he slowly stumbled after Ren, glancing back to make sure Henry was safe. Henry didn't move from their branch, watching as he walked out. But soon, his bird was hidden by Xisuma's figure as they followed him out the door. The click of the door closing filled him with both relief and fear.

Relief because Henry was safe.

Fear because of what would come next.

He tried stumbling, pushing back, but Ren was harder to fight than Techno. And Techno usually had to pick him up when he squirmed this much. Ren just tightened his grip on his shoulders, carefully pushing him ahead no matter how much he fought.

It felt like all too soon, they were back in the bedroom from before. “Sorry, it’s a bit small.” Ren said. The comment almost broke Tommy out of his fear because this? The hermit considered this small? What the fuck?

“It won’t be a problem.” Xisuma said. They both gracefully ignored Tommy’s attempt to straight up trample Ren and the stream of curses that had grown steadily louder.

He stumbled. His stomach met the soft cushion. The curses broke off, being replaced with a noise of pure shrill panic. No words, just the near animalistic sound of fear being pushed to its limits. Tommy squirmed, swatted, trying to delay for just a moment longer.

But it never came. Someone sat down next to him, but the crackling feeling didn’t appear. “Honey? Are you alright?” Xisuma asked. A gentle hand traced over his back but didn’t press down.

“Don’t.” Tommy said, his throat choking on the words. They rasped uncomfortably against his throat, the stream of curses had quickly worsened the sore throat he had. Not enough water probably, fucking biological needs. He should have evolved to lose them.

“What’s the problem?” Ren said. He was hovering over Tommy when he managed to sneak a glance up. “It’s just checking your personal code. You didn’t seem to mind that much when Xisuma offered to fix the glitches in your code.”

But he had minded. Hadn’t he? He wasn’t sure. Tommy dug his hands into the blankets, pushing the thought away. That was then and this was now. “He could do things.” Tommy insisted. “I’ve seen it. You could mess with someone’s personal code like this.”

He had seen it on 2b2t. Well, not personally. He had booked it from any places that had rumors swirling about the more insidious of mods and hacks, the ones that could erase memories, force hybrid features, even lock you to a server forever.

In his darker moments during exile, he would wonder if Dream had any of those hacks.

It was one thing to let the admin look for glitches in his player code but it felt like another to let them examine his personal code, the stuff that made Tommy the biggest man ever.

“Tommy, I’m not planning to do anything.” Xisuma said. It really sucked how even his tone was, how it made Tommy feel like maybe he was the one overreacting. “It’s just looking for glitches on a more minute level. I’d need hacks or specific magic to let me do any more than strip out contaminating code.”

“Then why can’t I say no?” Tommy challenged. Checkmate. Got ‘em.

Xisuma tilted their head back, looking at the ceiling for a moment. “Because as much as I want to trust that you care for your well-being, you have consistently put yourself in danger.”

He said. "As admin, protecting you from long term consequences of code contamination is my duty."

"I don't put myself in danger!"

He was Tommy Danger Innit. Danger ran from him, not the other way around. He didn't need to watch out for it, not at all! He always made good decisions.

Always.

"I don't want to bring down the mood." Ren said in the tone of someone who was about to bring down the mood. "But I literally found you about to die from a creeper attack, with multiple mob injuries. And you got those because instead of staying with one of the hermits or in the building you originally woke up in, you decided to go out alone, despite constant warnings that it was dangerous. The code check is all because of that."

Tommy flinched. "Fuck you." He hissed.

He just- He didn't want to be locked up anymore. He wanted to be free, independent, his own man. That night had been bad but that had been a fluke. An accident. He had always been able to survive on his own.

Exile had been hard but he had never had a night like that. Except for the first two. Or the one where Dream blew up his blankets and he spent the night shivering through a cold drizzle.

The hermits had been nice but that didn't mean they would always be nice. That they wouldn't get frustrated or he'd do something wrong and get kicked out on his ass. This time with even less supplies. It had been a tactical and well thought decision to leave.

Their mob spawning system had to be fucking broken. Did Phil say hardcore was that hard? Because the stories sounded cool but not like that.

The hand on his back pulled away. "I know you are uncomfortable with this but I promise it won't take long. You can watch to make sure I'm not making any unnecessary changes with your code." Xisuma said. "We can address your lack of self preservation."

"I'll show you lack of fucking self preservation." Tommy growled, pushing himself up. Swatting at Xisuma left him with nothing but a sore hand but it made him feel a little better. Even if the hermit didn't so much as twitch.

"Look, if Xisuma does anything wrong with your code, I'll kill him myself." Ren said, sitting down on Tommy's other side. "I promise on my role as a hermit. Admins shouldn't make any changes to the personal code of a player unless it is absolutely necessary."

Tommy stared at Ren. He glanced at Xisuma. He couldn't really see their face through the mask but they didn't seem to care that one of their friends had offered to murder them.

And annoyingly, it did make him feel better. Just a bit. Just a tiny little bit. That someone else was standing up for him, that they would kill another if he felt unsafe.

It could be a fucking lie but he didn't want it to be. He wanted it to be the truth.

He glanced between Xisuma and Ren, taking a deep breath. It might as well happen. It's not- Xisuma didn't seem like a wrongun. Not like Dream had. That admin didn't seem to want to change him. And it all sounded so reasonable.

Fuck. He half wished he hadn't chosen to leave now. At least he wouldn't be having to deal with this.

"Fine." Tommy grumbled. "But if you do anything or touch anything important, I'll kill you myself before Ren can."

"I would expect nothing less." Xisuma said evenly. One hand pressed against his back. Even braced for it, the feeling of the coding window opening was still horrible. Tommy watched the glowing blue code scroll by the screen, waiting for any movements. For the betrayal of his trust.

"So far so good." Xisuma reported. He tilted his head, watching the code in front of him. "I'm seeing some minor corruption, but that's the lingering effects from the glitches in your player data. None of it looks to be serious enough to produce crippling effects or to turn into a virus."

"See? I told you it wouldn't be so bad." Tommy rolled his eyes. "Just give it a bit longer and let Doc Xisuma give you a clean bill of health."

"Hm." Xisuma tapped the screen, freezing it on one coded section. Tommy jerked, twisting around.

But Ren moved faster. Their hands hovered over Xisuma's. "What's wrong?" He asked. He glanced down at Tommy and Tommy slowly eased back. They were defending him. It was oddly nice.

"I'm not planning to modify the data here. Only looking at an oddity I've found." Xisuma said. They produce an odd, eerie whistling noise. "This should have been reflected in his player profile. The fact it is not is concerning."

"What is it?" Tommy asked. "Don't fucking dance around it."

"Are you aware that you have a locked hybrid status?"

Chapter End Notes

Basically in this chapter, Xisuma and Tommy meet again. Tommy's initially worried Xisuma's gonna hurt Henry and then very worried after Xisuma brings up needed to check his personal code. Tommy is Not A Fan because personal code contains a lot of important player info and it can be dangerous if someone hacks or modified it.

Xisuma and Ren try to push him into it because they're worried he might have infections or corruptions from the mob attack. Henry attacks Xisuma and Tommy nearly has a panic attack and finally agrees to move to a different room for the check. They talk, Ren and Xisuma bring up how Tommy keeps diving into danger, and Ren promises that he'll kill Xisuma if the other hacks his code. Tommy agrees to the check, and Xisuma reviews his code, pausing and revealing Tommy has a locked hybrid status.

To explain, player stats where Tommy's glitch is and what admins typically work with, is fairly straightforward. It's the code of the player as it pertains to the server such as statistics, player tag, whitelist, health, and a few other factors.

Personal code is basically what makes a player themselves. Think of this like Tommy said, like DNA, it determines the player's height, hair color, hybrid status, and also contains a few other things like memory.

Xisuma isn't lying about the corruption aspect though, the man is legit worried Tommy accidentally got himself seriously messed up. He's just not the best at getting kids to their doctors appointments.

Of Manifestations and Coding

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Emotional manipulation!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I- locked hybrid status?” Tommy said, staring at Xisuma. Maybe if he stared hard enough, that would make all the words make sense again. A locked hybrid status? “The fuck is that?”

“Language but yes, it’s locked. There’s a section of coding here that only appears in those with a hybrid status.” Xisuma said. He tapped the screen, enlarging the code before showing it to Tommy.

It just looked like regular personal code to him. The eldritch bastard child of binary and enchantment table runes who decide to put themselves through a blender for shits and giggles. There was no blinking neon sign saying HYBRID in huge letters. No detailed sticky note or memo. Not even so much as a name. It could have been anything and he would have no clue.

But it was grayed out, a sure sign of locked code. Philza had told him about locked code before, more of a ghoulish story about what happened if you fucked around too much with hackers. Entire sections of your code, grayed out and inaccessible. Completely wiped away.

But it shouldn’t be possible.

“I’m not a hybrid though.” Tommy said, his fingertips anxiously tapping at his knees. “That has to be wrong. You gotta be reading it wrong, big man. I know I’m not.”

He had always been Tommy the human. It wasn’t exactly a bad thing. Quite a lot of players tended towards humanoid, with most landing on the human side of the scale.

There were no mysterious features when he was born, yeah? He was pretty sure he would have noticed them while he was growing up. And it had been Tubbo to go through his late manifestation when he was just a preteen, Tommy holding him as the other screamed and shook with the pain of his horns appearing.

You were either born a hybrid like Fundy or you manifested young. There were no other routes. Tommy had done neither and had accepted that about himself. It kind of sucked, yeah, he was a bit jealous of Tubbo’s sudden strength or Fundy’s quickness or Sapnap’s ability to create fire. And wings, oh, once he had sworn he was going to be an avian hybrid like Philza with the biggest wings ever. The other had laughed and said that he would be his little fledgling.

(The wings never came. Was that why Philza stopped loving him?)

But he didn't need to be a hybrid to be the biggest man ever. He had come to terms with that a long time ago. Tommy was human.

But now he was staring at code that said he wasn't.

"No, it looks kind of familiar to me too." Ren said. He shrugged at Tommy's stare. "Xisuma's reviewed my code with me a few times before, I've seen my hybrid code enough times to recognize some of the features. It's not an exact copy but there's stuff here and there if you look."

"But I never manifested anything." Tommy protested. Maybe some of the code was grayed out but shouldn't there have been something? Anything? A strange burst of instincts, slightly different features, something that was a little odder than normal?

"Whoever locked this was completely systematic." Xisuma said. His voice was cold and steely. Tommy stiffened, something cold settling in his chest as Ren growled. A little voice told him not to move. "They didn't just wipe away the physical features, they locked everything. Memories, instincts, even removing coding for the underlying musculature and bones that support the hybrid features."

Xisuma was...

Xisuma was mad. There was more force to the way he tapped on the screen, a building hum of static in the background. At him? Tommy sat frozen, waiting for the anvil to drop. That dark mask looked up at him.

Did he do something wrong? Turn this off himself? Or would Xisuma be mad at him for bringing this into his server? Or causing him more work? It wasn't his fucking fault but who knew if Xisuma would care about that. Dream would have been pissed if Tommy gave him more work to deal with.

Ren wouldn't even help him because Ren was growling, a deep sound that spoke of bloody fights and snapping teeth. Ren was mad too.

"I didn't know." Tommy choked out. Would he be punished? "I didn't do this."

"Oh honey. I'm not mad at you." Tommy nearly flinched back as the cool armored hand cupped his cheek, a thumb swiping over the curve of his cheek bone. "This wasn't your fault."

It wasn't?

"Tommy." Ren said, the growl subsiding into a rumble. His arms tightened around Tommy into something that was more of a too tight hug. "A lock like this is completely illegal by the galactic standards. Not even anarchy servers would do this. They didn't just hack your personal code, they completely violated it."

“But no, nothing is out of bounds for anarchy servers.” Tommy said, caught off guard. 2b2t had allowed slavery, griefing, hacking, everything.

“This is.” Xisuma said, shaking his head. “The only reason personal code, especially hybrid code, is locked is when it is a danger to the player’s life. And even then, it has to be approved by multiple admins and the player usually has to stay in approved servers with older admins guarding them. I can only think of a handful of players who received that kind of lock. Even then, the code isn’t locked this completely. Tommy, everything is gone.”

“Not to mention, that’s elective. The player usually awakens their hybrid nature and then petitions the admin council for it to be locked. Tommy, did you agree to have this done to you?” Ren pointed out. Tommy shook his head.

“I don’t fucking think so? I never manifested anything.” He said. Wilbur had been pretty clingy during the early days of the Dream SMP, constantly watching for any signs. Nothing had ever appeared.

Ren growled, his grip tightening before quickly loosening as Tommy helped a bit, feeling a spark of pain from his side. “Sorry. It’s just, whoever did this to you is a criminal.”

“It’s not that bad?” Tommy said, a bit surprised. Why was this such a big deal? He might have gotten hacked back in his 2b2t days by a fucker who thought it was funny. Or maybe it had been stripped away from him as punishment for something.

Don’t get him wrong, it disgusted him down to his core to think that someone had messed with his code without him ever knowing about it. That someone had stolen past his guard and stripped away something so valuable. Stripped away part of his identity.

It made his stomach lurch and twist, bile burning at the back of his throat.

But what confused him was how much the hermits cared. By the way they spoke, it sounded like Techno when he was stopping himself from running out and stripping some asshole of all of his limbs.

“Tommy.” Tommy turned back towards Xisuma too late, freezing as Xisuma leaned over him. “Someone locked your code. They took away stuff that was uniquely yours. Locking hybrid code isn’t just horrible, it’s absolute torture.”

“I had mine locked for a while.” Ren whispered. Tommy snuck a glance and the other looked absolutely haunted, sunglasses turned away. “My admin said he was just trying to help me, that the wolf was too vicious to be free. The worst part is that even with everything locked, I could feel the empty space left behind. I’d find myself doing stuff without understanding, instinct without the actual instinctive Knowledge. It made me miserable.”

He sighed, leaning forward as Xisuma combed a hand through his hair, some of the tension easing from his frame. “That’s some heavy stuff, big man.” Tommy said. Hesitantly, he leaned into Ren, trying for comfort. The other hermits like touch, yeah? He could tolerate it for a little bit to make Ren happy.

Ren smiled at him. "I'm doing better now, the hermits helped me through it and that admin will never do it again." He said, matter of fact and a smirk curling across his lips. "It's just, I don't like the fact that another asshole out there thought they could do it again."

"Tommy, did you ever allow another to look at your personal code?" Xisuma asked. He leaned back, letting Tommy move freely again. "Judging by the code markers, it's likely this would have been a late manifestation, so any time before you entered your teens is suspect."

"Fuck no." Tommy denied instantly. Not even Philza or Wilbur had taken a peek at his code. They never seemed very interested, not even when he entered places where he could have got mob infections. (Why didn't they care enough to push and push to check like the hermits did?)

Xisuma sighed. "Which means whoever did this likely had some admin training." He said, scrolling through the rest of Tommy's code. "Only an admin of a server could force a player's coding to appear and then edit it without their permission. Most admins, such as me, refuse to force it but others are more... cruel. A hacker might be able to do it, but they'd still need to open access permissions to get to this level of personal code."

An admin. Tommy's fingers dug into the blankets.

"Tommy, do you know any admins who would have done this to you?" Ren asked gently. "This is a pretty serious crime to do to players."

He only knew a handful of admins. Boffy, he doubted the guy would have done this to him. The man had enjoyed a bit of cruel pranks but not to this level. Man just really hated cows. There was Josh who was... a maybe? He had killed him once with Business Bay. It had been kind of a sore subject for the admin.

No, but then the man gave him the bouncy command block. Why give him that but also lock his code? That would be a real clusterfuck way of announcing you were mad. Plus, he hadn't seen the other in forever.

"It's usually used as a means for control." Xisuma said, filling the silence. Tommy's stomach lurched, threatening that it was going to revolt on him. "Preventing a manifestation or hybrid features are usually used to control a player through fear or ensure they won't be strong enough to rebel. If that helps you narrow it down."

That left three admins he knew well. Dream, Philza, and Wilbur.

Dream definitely seem like the fucker who would do something like this. And it seemed wrong because the other was his friend. He shouldn't hurt Tommy like this, friends didn't do this to friends. Unless he thought it was a good idea somehow. Or, Tommy viciously took control of his train of thought. Dream wouldn't definitely do something like this to make sure he was helpless. Couldn't risk Tommy becoming an even bigger man.

Philza and Wilbur... He didn't think so. He didn't want to think so. Philza had been just as excited as Tommy was about the possibility of him manifesting. Wilbur was so so clingy,

refusing to even go more than a few chunks away as if Tommy was going to keel over and speedrun the entire manifestation in seconds. They would have never done this to him.

Would they?

or ensure they won't be strong enough to rebel.

Both of them had admin powers. Both of them were experienced. Tommy would have never so much as had a second thought if they asked to see his personal code. Maybe in the beginning when they had first met but he had trusted them. They wouldn't have done this to him, even with their admin powers.

Wilbur. Wilbur who was so so angry during Pogtopia. Who constantly screamed and stormed around. Who would blow up if he even hinted that he was thinking about moving, when he said maybe they should just leave L'Manburg and go have some fun somewhere else.

Wilbur, who had been furious when Tubbo manifested. Tubbo and he could only meet outside of Pogtopia after that, Tubbo being practically banished until his role as a spy had come to an end.

"Tommy?"

"He wouldn't have." Tommy mumbled. "Not to me."

Wilbur had loved him. He wasn't always good at it. And during Pogtopia, sometimes it felt like the Wilbur he had known had disappeared in the night. And Philza, no matter how disappointed he was that Tommy had chosen to follow Wilbur, wouldn't have locked his hybrid code as punishment. He had always been kind.

Except for the time he had gotten shackled in the nest for trying to explore too far. Or when Philza would dive tackle him the moment he had taken a step over the invisible boundary around their base. Wilbur and him had snuck away in the night.

No. It had to be Dream. They wouldn't have done something like this to him. They had cared about him. Even if now, it seemed like they had never cared at all.

"Tommy, I really do need to know who might have done this. Whoever did this is a criminal and they'll need to be punished." Xisuma said, reaching out to tilt Tommy's chin up again so he was looking at him. "I would never forgive myself if one of my players got hurt again because they had someone dangerous in their past."

"No one. Can't think of a single person." Tommy lied. Xisuma stared at him, as if he was able to see right through him to the lie.

It irked him, having to pretend Dream wasn't the asshole that he most definitely was. But he didn't have a choice. The first problem was that if the hermits believed him, Dream would get handed over to whatever passed for a justice system and Tommy would never get to get his own back. To stand over Dream and know he had finally won.

The other problem was that Dream was famous. He had a reputation for his speedrunning and battle prowess. So many people liked him, respected him, admired him. They had the wool completely pulled over their eyes.

Dream had laughed at him once when he threatened to reveal how much of an asshole he was to the server. To tell them what happened during exile, first in Pogtopia and now in Logstedshire.

"Who's going to believe you?" He said between wheezes. "The annoying child who destroys everything when he doesn't get his way? The brat who cares more about discs rather than people? They're going to believe me, the admin who's been cleaning up all your mistakes? Stop whining about your justified punishment."

More likely he'd be thrown right back to Dream.

"Not even your current admin?" Xisuma asked, words slow and careful. For a moment, Tommy hesitated, before shaking his head again.

If it was Dream who did this, he'd kill him himself. There was no need to bring in whatever council Xisuma was talking about.

But it was very clear that Xisuma wasn't falling for it. Tommy held his gaze as evenly as he could, hands fidgeting slightly with the blanket. He wasn't going to break first. Xisuma wasn't going to get anything out of him.

Slowly, Xisuma's mask tilted back down to the code panel. "I suppose we can discuss this later. You'll likely be more willing to talk after your manifestation hits and you realize the magnitude of what was done. Now, I'll be staying with you the entire time to ensure the glitch doesn't interfere with it."

Wait. Back up. "My manifestation?" Tommy asked, starting to slide off the bed but he was prevented by Ren who dragged him right back up. "I'm not doing that."

He wasn't supposed to be manifesting. And yeah, maybe it was because of a code lock, but that didn't change the facts. Tommy was human. And he was going to stay that way. He didn't have to be dealing with new body parts or powers as cool as that may be. Maybe, just maybe, sometime in the future he'd do it. After Dream was dead, after L'manburg was free, after he got his family back .

"You kinda have to." Ren said. "If you put it off for too long, you risk serious injuries trying to manifest after all your muscles and bones and stuff have finished growing."

"Then I just won't." Tommy said. Who needs to be a hybrid? Human Tommy had gotten along just fine. There was no need to bring any new species stuff into it. He had his hands full enough planning to kill Dream and end his exile. Lots of big plans for this big man.

"Tommy, if you don't do this, you won't go back home."

Tommy froze, staring at Xisuma. “You can’t do this.” He whispered. Xisuma had promised to help and now they were forcing him to stay here?

“Tommy, I don’t want to do this? Remember what I said about your ability to get into danger? I promised to fix your code and deleting this code lock is part of that.” Xisuma said firmly. He paused for a moment, taken in Tommy’s frozen horror. “If you don’t fix this, and the coding is glitched, it could mean the glitch reappearing when you’re back in your home server if the code ever becomes unlocked. You’ll have to find another admin, an experienced one, for help, and that’s if you survive a glitched manifestation on your own. If they aren’t experienced, you could be looking at months of recovery.”

Another admin. “How do code locks break?” Tommy said, his voice edging on shrill. Ren winced but didn’t move away, one hand coming up to comb through his hair in a way that was frustratingly distracting.

Xisuma tilted his head. “Multiple ways. Some just break, some weaken and break if the admin dies or leave the server, some never break. It’s really up to chance but I will say, it’s more likely that it will break than that it won’t break.”

Could he take a side trip to Boffy for help? But no, that would take too long, Boffy was still a newbie admin and both locked code and glitches seemed a bit beyond creative mode chaos. He had to take care of Dream now. Tubbo and L’Manburg were depending on him. But if it broke after Dream died...

He didn’t want to die. Not after finally getting his freedom. After finally winning.

“This isn’t fair.” Tommy mumbled, folding his arms and glaring at the floor. He just wanted to have his glitch fixed and to go home. He didn’t want to have to deal with this right now.

“You need this.” Xisuma said, tapping on the coding window. “I’ll be activating a program which should start stripping away the code lock.”

“We’ll stay with you every step of the way.” Ren promises, nudging him affectionately.

“The actual transformation itself will only take a few days.” Xisuma said, gently. A few days. That wasn’t too bad. “I’ll keep you asleep for most of the time. Unfortunately, it has been delayed enough that the actual process would be very unpleasant if you were awake and dampening your sensory links now could risk damaging any forming nerves.”

Tommy huffed. He still didn’t like the idea of this. “Put me under, boss man.” He said. “The quickest I get this over with, the better.”

A flash of blue coding. Tommy slumped back, panic vanishing under a wave of calm as gentle hands caught him and lowered him to the mattress.

He hoped Tubbo was alright by himself.

Xisuma sighed heavily, leaning back into his chair. The viewer in his mask had been developed specifically for reading code quickly and still, he could feel the phantom fatigue in his eyes. It was a good thing the bulk of his work was already done.

“It was his admin who did it, wasn’t it?” Ren said, leaning back into his chair. He kept a close eye on Tommy who was beginning to shift in his sleep. “Want me to draft the message to the council?”

Knowing Ren, the email would be as rude as one could get. Xisuma shelved the request for later. “Not yet. Tommy’s in a delicate state right now. If he finds out we sent it now, he may realize the measures we had to take to protect him before he can comprehend their use.”

A new player entering his server was a work of utmost delicacy. Ensuring they were safe, curbing their self destructive impulses meant needing to know as much as he could. And it was a long slow process. He could only examine some coding and a handful of memories about Tommy and it concerned him deeply. How could he help Tommy without knowing what was happening?

Patience, he reminded himself. Tommy wasn’t like the other hermits who understood the need for openness, especially with the terrible events that had followed them for so long. They could work their way up to that level of permission. Tommy had already made such a good leap by allowing him official permission to look at his coding. He’d have to find some way of rewarding him.

And it finally let him deal with the locked coding situation.

“Oo, Xisuma being tricky.” Ren teased, reaching over to playfully shove him. “What’s next, the return of the prankster Xisuma?”

“Perhaps.” Xisuma said, allowing the warmth to fill his tone. Ren had been one of the best choices to find Tommy. Perhaps it was the lingering memory of the man caring for Tommy while they were sick or perhaps it was some part of Ren’s personality that made Tommy warm up to him so much quicker. Made him so much more agreeable to their help

He clicked another line of code, letting the program carefully tease away the coding from the lock setting. Gentle, ever so gentle. Unlocking a late hybrid manifestation was a skill he unfortunately had too much experience in.

It gratified him though sometimes. Carefully releasing one of his from the cruelty of their previous admin. Watching the marks of their world get erased.

“Can you tell what he’ll be yet?” Ren said, leaning over to look at the code. “Doesn’t look like my wolf coding.”

“Not yet.” Xisuma said. Whoever had locked this code had tried their best to hide it away, bury it amongst the less pertinent code to whoever may come looking for it. It made it harder, though not impossible, to decipher.

The thought of someone doing this to their players, ripping away hybrid status from someone who was not yet fully grown, Tommy's aching distrust in even basic kindness, made his fingers twitch to make sure to take them out of the equation permanently. That was going to be later though. Tommy needed to know he was safe and welcome here before they took the step to let him know he would always be safe.

"Don't think I didn't see that!" Ren said. "Looks like Mr. Admin is going to be the next one spending a few days getting his head worked out."

Despite his teasing, Ren's tone was warm. Right. Xisuma did need to take a few days to stay with another Hermit. Let them help him through his issues. "I'll need to finish this first though." He said, checking the coding. "I haven't seen any glitches but I worry about complications."

Tommy should have rightfully manifested years ago.

"Then we'll be tacking on another few days for overworking." Xisuma sighed but nodded, accepting the tight hold that settled on his upper arm. It didn't constrict him but it was a reminder that Ren was here, watching in case he slid a bit down too far into less pleasant memories. "Can't believe the kid thought it was a good idea to ask us to stop his manifestation."

"He's scared. We all once were." Xisuma said. Tommy didn't realize how deeply his former server had damaged him, it wasn't the first time he had encountered it.

"But still. He was willing to be permanently locked." Xisuma hadn't lied, no, but for Tommy's safety, he may have overemphasized the chances his coding was glitched and the code lock would fail. "He's gonna need so much help still."

"And we'll be there for it." Xisuma said. "You can message the others now if you like. After a manifestation is the best time to bond with new people, his instincts will help him overcome his fears."

And while Ren tapped on his comm with his free hand, Xisuma mentally planned how exactly he'd be dealing with that pesky other admin.

Chapter End Notes

Hermits are really on a roll with pressuring Tommy to make decisions he's not comfortable with. It was super fun writing Xisuma's pov because he really has such a different perspective of events than Tommy. The Hermit are messed up but they honestly do believe that they're doing the right thing.

New Meetings and Newer Changes

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Blood, pain, mild suicidal thoughts (manifestation is Stressful), emotional manipulation

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy was beginning to understand why Tubbo had screamed and sobbed through most of his manifestation. Because this? This was agony.

Worse than the time he was pushed into lava while exploring 2b2t. Worse than stumbling into a gravel trap. Worse than the missiles of SMP Earth. Worse even than the feeling of being cut down by someone he trusted or the feeling of a wither explosion crackling across his skin.

Every nerve seemed to light up and scream with pain. Even breathing was a struggle and he had to frantically work to get air in.

The worst part, he thought muzzily, was the out of body experience the forced sleep brought him.

It was like constantly bumping into a lava wall. One moment, he was drifting away, his thoughts slowly slipping away into the hazy blackness of sleep. Everything distant and forgettable.

The next moment, everything lit up with pain and he was choking on a scream as his mind was consumed with it. He couldn't even move, his muscles spasming without his control. Helpless and in pain and unable to fight or stop it.

And then the connection would snap and he would slip back towards sleep again. But for a few hazy moments, he could feel what was going on outside.

A hand frantically combing through his hair, voice laced with a soothing rumble. "You're okay, pup, you're doing so good. Absolutely amazing. Just a little bit longer. Come on, you can keep this up."

Was he? Was he doing this well? Something inside Tommy ached to lean into the touch, but all he could do was shake as hot tears slowly slipped down his face.

He didn't feel like he was doing well. He didn't feel like he was doing much at all really.

"So, so good." The voice repeated. "I know it hurts but I promise you, we'll do something fun later, yeah? We can visit my tower. You'll love it. Or you can come to Doc's with me

when he inevitably kidnaps me away from my builds because he thinks I'm being stupid again. You just need to get through this, pup."

Tommy fought to cling to those words. He tried to speak back, to force his voice to say... something. He wasn't really sure. Maybe ask them to stop this whole thing.

But instead, sleep dragged him down again.

When he came back, the agony had tripled but apparently had decided to park itself right in his back. It sunk its claws deep into the bones and muscles until it felt like his very blood was electrified. Or filled with creepers who were exploding constantly. Charged creepers. Thinking was hard.

A cold hand settled on his back, making some of the pain ease away. Tommy could have cried in relief. "He's doing okay." Someone said. Xisuma? It sounded like Xisuma, with the almost mechanical accent.

Okay? Okay? This didn't feel like okay, this felt like the nether and the void crammed together in some unholy union. This felt like a situation which called for new words to summarize how bad it was.

"He doesn't look okay. I don't think it was this bad when I manifested? Or maybe it was and I forgot?" Grian? Was that Grian? Why was he here? "Are you sure we can't give him anything for this?"

"He can't get any healing or regen potions because it could interfere with his muscle growth. And if we give him weakness potions, his body might not be strong enough to push through the changes and it could kill him." A heavily accented voice said. Doctor lady? The words were hard to hear, far away.

"Yours was easier too, Tommy was hurt, recently sick, and malnourished. If it wasn't for the fact that locking his hybrid traits could hurt him more in the long run, I would have waited longer to let him recover." Xisuma said.

The cold hand moved away and Tommy felt his muscles begin to lock with pain. Why did they leave him? Why force him back into this pain?

"I've checked the code as many times as possible, I even got Joe to check it over. He's already at the max pain dampening advised. If I push it further, it risks damaging the developing nerves or him damaging himself by pushing too far because he can't feel the pain." Xisuma said. Tommy made a shrill, agonized sound, wheezing with the effort it took. "Apologies for this."

The cold hand settled back on his back. Tommy could have cried with relief. "We can't ice it for too long either or we risk hurting him. All we can do is stay and wait. I'm keeping his mind as far under as possible to try and protect him from the worst of it."

"It'll be okay, Grian. Do you want to go to your nest while we wait?" New voice. Vaguely familiar, something about his accent? He wasn't sure. With Xisuma's hand back, the cold was

beginning to override the pain again and sleep beckoned.

“No, I’m going to be here for them.” Grian said. His back spasmed again as a warm hand settled on it but the pain had reached a point that it didn’t seem quite real any more. It just hurt and hurt and hurt. “He won’t wake up alone.”

“Not a chance of that anyways.” The familiar voice said, tinged with a laugh. Where had he heard it from?

“Phil?” Tommy mumbled.

And then he passed out.

Did he say the pain got worse before? Because it got worse again.

Now on top of his back constantly spasming like someone was tearing a knife through his skin, his head felt like someone was drilling a hole through it. Slowly. And painfully. And did he mention, painfully?

He could feel hot liquid slipping down his face. And it wasn’t tears. His chest heaved weakly for breath.

He could feel the creeping sensation of death, the siren call of a respawning already singing in his ears. The trickster call.

This was it. The hermits were trying to torture him to death. It had all been an elaborate trick to lead him to this, like a lamb to the slaughter. And he, the moron, had fallen for it. If he fell now, there would be no coming back.

“Tommy, Tommy, breath-“

“A respawning would be-“

He could go see Wil maybe. Find out where his real brother had gone after he died and left Ghostbur behind. Finally ask all the questions he had never gotten answered. Why Wil left him. Why Wil went crazy. Why did he push the button.

It would be so peaceful. Finally, getting a chance to rest. No more fighting. No more desperate survival. No more hungry nights or mornings that began underwater.

He should want this. He had built a tower and stood at the top. Tubbo, L’Manburg, Philza, Techno, even Wilbur had all turned their backs on him.

“Come on, just a little longer-“

“Get the medical kit-“

But he refused to go out this way. He had survived 2b2t, one of the most infamous anarchy servers around. SMP Earth where he clashed with gods and survived. Where he and his

friends had killed a lesser god and survived. A revolutionary war on the Dream SMP, a civil war, and the betrayal of the Blade.

Exile.

He had lost two lives and he wasn't willing to lose his third one today.

And as he forced his eyes to open, forced his chest to rise and fall even as his lungs screamed and dark spots appeared in his vision...

He didn't think the hermits had led him to his death. Maybe it was stupidity, maybe it was his asshole heart leading him astray again. Maybe once again he was going to be tricked and led like a lamb to a slaughter. Again and again, he met people and trusted them and they had all left him in the end.

No matter how much they swore they would love him forever, they had brought down his walls, and then left him in the dust. He should be done with this, heart closed off and unwilling to trust again. He'd claw his way back, free them, and show them that he was worthy of love again.

And yet.

And yet.

Something in his heart screamed to give the hermits another chance.

Scar and Doc who had healed him. Xisuma who had agreed to help with the glitch. Grian who had been so soft and kind. Scar with the funny stories and the eating contests. Ren who had saved him and told him he would never leave. Even the ones he hadn't met yet, but had agreed to let him stay in a world he had broken into and endangered.

A little voice that whispered that maybe this time, it would be different. Maybe after Dream was dead and L'Manburg was safe, he could come back. Maybe they would be willing to keep him.

And if he died here, he would never know for sure.

Fuck death.

So, Tommy clung on. Until his skin ripped apart and the pain dimmed to something horrifyingly painful, but more like an ax buried in his back than the agonizing wildfire that came before. He forced himself to keep breathing, holding his coding together with nothing but willpower and spite.

Just a bit longer. Something wet splattered on his back and he felt the muscles spasm as coolness spread over his skin. Just a bit longer. He felt something being wrapped around him. Just a bit longer.

A cold hand settled on his head. "You can sleep now." The harsh mechanical accent was gone, replaced with something echoey, almost distorted. But he still knew who it was.

Xisuma. "You've done well. Get some rest."

"Fuck you." Tommy mumbled. And then he passed out.

When he came to, he felt like a ravager had used him as a doormat. And then a vindicator had taken an axe to him for good measure. Just like the utter shit had gotten kicked out of him.

Ugh. Even the pit hadn't been as bad as this. But at least he had gotten in a good couple of hits, probably could have beaten the Blade if they hadn't stopped the fight too soon.

"Who's the one who hit me?" He mumbled. "I'll kick their butt. Give 'em a good clarting."

There was a twittering laugh. "Who uses the word clarting?" Tommy tried to push himself up, shaking with the effort. Someone pushed him back down. "No, don't move too fast, birdie. You're going to hurt yourself. It's not fully healed yet?"

"Huh?" Tommy mumbled. He slowly blinked his eyes open, wincing at the dim light that hit him. Prime, the deja vu was intense. Shouldn't he be done with this?

If he had a cobblestone for every time he had woken up in a weird place after passing out, he'd have three cobblestone. Which wasn't a lot but it was weird it kept happening.

"Hey, how you feeling?" Red. Blood? Then his eyes adjusted and he realized he was seeing a bit of Grian's sweater. The other crouched in front of him, the only way he could see them because he was lying in his stomach. He tried to roll over and quick hands shot out to stop him.

"Woah, woah, there. You're going to hurt yourself if you do that." Grian said. Tommy huffed, ignoring him as he tried to roll over again.

"Wow, Grian. Only an hour and you've already annoyed him into ignoring you. That has to be a new record." There was that familiar voice again.

"Mumbo." Grian whined. Tommy peeked out from the blankets as the other walked around, putting out a hand to block Tommy from rolling over as well. His eyes went wide. He knew that name too. There were tons of redstone videos on the wider server channel under the name. He had marathoned all the old ones and kept up with every new one until Phil had gotten annoyed and blocked the channel on his comm.

He wasn't really sure why, some excuse on him getting into trouble by trying redstone projects that were beyond him. Tommy had thought it was stupid because that's why he watched tutorials, so he definitely knew how to do those projects.

Or maybe it was because of why Tommy gravitated to Mumbo specifically.

Maybe he, just an itty bit tiny one, literally infinitesimal, so small one could barely even see it, thought Mumbo would be cool. As like a dad. Or a brother. Not that he would have ever replaced his family but he thought of what it would be like to have Mumbo's soft deep voice encouraging him, specifically making jokes with him, so much. More often before he met Philza and the rest but still.

He had never told them but he was pretty sure they knew with how excited he got when a new video surfaced. Wilbur had gotten snappy whenever he talked too much about them. And eventually, he stopped talking about them. He couldn't rewatch them anyways.

And now he was here. Tommy buried his face in the pillow, trying to not let them see how his cheeks had flamed red.

"Hey, man! You're looking a lot better than when I last saw you!" Mumbo said. Tommy peeked out, hoping they couldn't see the red on his cheeks.

"I've never met you before." He pointed out. He would have totally remembered meeting the great Mumbo Jumbo. Would have written that into a journal like stupid Ranboo did.

"Yeah, you did! I was the one who fished you out of the ocean! You look a lot better than you did then, you were in pretty bad shape." Mumbo said. He sat next to Tommy on the bed, shoving away Grian and ignoring their squawk of annoyance. Tommy's back spasmed, making him hiss a bit with pain.

Tommy buried his face in the pillow with a barely muffled groan. He kind of vaguely remembered being in the ocean. He also remembered kicking whoever pulled him out pretty hard. "Uh, sorry for hitting you." He said awkwardly. He didn't know what he would do if one of his long-time idols hated him.

"No big deal at all! I'd rather you never do it again but Grian has kicked me far harder before." mumbo said. He dodged Grian's swat to his shoulder. "It's true! You kicked me when we first met and I was limping around for weeks. It was terrible."

"You're so mean Mumbo. Tarnishing my good reputation in front of Tommy." Grian whined. He turned towards Tommy. "Why didn't you apologize to me? I was there too and you hit me!."

"Uh." Tommy said intelligently, floundering a bit. Was Grian mad at him? "Sorry? You can hit me back if you want."

Grian's face did that odd thing again, sharing a glance with Mumbo. "I suppose I can accept a substitute." Grian said. Tommy froze.

He had half hoped that Grian wouldn't take his offer seriously. It was reflex to offer it, honed from when Dream would let him pick his own punishments and when Wilbur got angry during Pogtopia. But he had been really hoping that they wouldn't, if they were strong enough to kill Dream, they could probably hit hard as fuck. But he couldn't pussy out now or they'd get even madder.

Fuck. He had thought Grian was nice.

Tommy forced himself to stay still, forcing his arms to stay at his sides. But it wasn't quite working, his back kept spasming under the odd weight of the blanket on top of him. No blocking, he wanted to say. So please don't hit too hard. I'm being good. He braced, waiting for impact as Grian moved.

Only to freeze as Grian flopped down next to him, carefully lifting away the blanket before he did, pulling him in. The other tucked his Face into Tommy's shoulders, shifting slightly to get comfortable. Tommy sat there dumbly, his face almost pressed into Grian's hair. "Uh." He locked eyes with Mumbo, hoping for an explanation but the other didn't move, reading through his comm. "What are you doing, big man?"

Grian shifted, pulling his face up. But he didn't move away at all, instead propping up his chin on Tommy's shoulder. "I'm not going to hit you." He said. "But a hug is a good trade! You looked like you need one. This isn't quite a hug but it works."

Tommy spluttered. "Fuck you! I'm not a little kid."

Mumbo glanced up. "Language." he said. "Xisuma doesn't like that kind of language on his server."

"I know." Tommy said with a huff, trying to ignore how Grian was still leaning into him. "But I'm not going to stop just because he doesn't like it."

mumbo hummed, but didn't answer. Forcing Tommy to focus on the arm slung over his shoulder. It was unbearable. He wanted to lean it. He wanted to pull away. His skin felt hot and tight where Grian was touching him, vacillating between being too much and not enough. Fuck, how long had it been since he had been properly hugged? Tubbo and him had hugged once in Pogtopia but that had been a quick little side hug, quickly forced apart in case anyone was around and could see them.

Tommy took a deep breath. "Thank you could let go now?" He asked, forcing his force to keep steady. Big men didn't get upset by stuff as small as hugs!

"I don't think that's a good idea." Grian said, making Tommy bristle. "You seem really stressed out and I know touch always helps me! You've already had multiple panic attacks and keeping you here, in this moment, could help you keep your breathing steady so you don't slide into another one."

"Fuck you." Tommy snapped, bristling. He tried to squirm but Grian's hold was as steady as netherite. "I'm a big man! I don't need hugs and I don't have panic attacks! Any claim that I do is propaganda!"

Mumbo glanced up from their comm, slipping it back into their pocket. "Am I a big man?" He asked.

"I-what?" Tommy paused, his brow furrowing. Why was the other asking this? "Of course you are. You're Mumbo Jumbo." It was obvious. Sky was blue, the grass was green. Mumbo Jumbo was a big man.

"Well, I like getting hugs. And if I'm a big man and you're a big man, that should mean you like getting hugs too." Mumbo pointed out. Tommy spluttered at the short answer, not quite able to find the words to refute it.

Either Mumbo Jumbo wasn't a big man and cuddles sucked. Or Mumbo Jumbo was a big man and cuddles were things they did. Which meant Tommy wouldn't be a big man if he didn't get some cuddles and ugghhhh-

"That's not how that works!" he said, frustrated. With an annoyed groan, he pressed his face into the bed.

He didn't like it. One because he didn't want it. The other because this was something Phil would do. The awkward little side hug while laying down so their wings could stay outstretched and Tommy wouldn't accidentally roll on top of them. It was sickeningly familiar, and without thinking, he leaned a bit into Grian's side, earning a soft coo of delight.

And yet, he craved it. And Tommy was shocked to hear a soft warbling sound slipping out of his own lips.

"Comfy, isn't it?" Grian said. "Stress knits these blankets herself. So does Xisuma but he hasn't had much time for knitting since you showed up. He's been trying to get your coding back together."

"Sorry." Tommy mumbled. It wasn't great being reminded how much of a huge inconvenience he was. He couldn't go one week without causing problems for others.

Mumbo groaned. "Look at him, you made him sad," he said. He leaned back slightly, looking up from his Comm. "Xisuma is happy to do it. If he really didn't want to, he does know admins who would have helped you. Easy as that."

Or we would have killed you. Tommy could read in between the lines just fine. He heard the rumors of what happened when people broke into Hermitcraft without permission. A soft hissing sound escaped his throat and he hunched into himself, half out of shock and half out of fear.

Grian cooed. "It's fine, you're home here, mate." He said. He reached up to Tommy's forehead and Tommy pulled back slightly.

Only to melt as Grian's clawed hands carefully traced circles around something, making little tingles of happiness and relaxation vibrate down his spine. Tommy slumped against the bed, eyes half lidded, unnoticing of the chirps and warbles that escaped him. "That better?" Grian said, pulling away.

Tommy made a soft whining sound, flushing red when he realized what he had done. One snap and he could have his ax again. "What the fuck is that? The fuck did you do to me? How the fuck?"

Mumbo and Grian shared a look. "Did you forget you're a hybrid now?" Mumbo said. "Kind of par for the course, buddy."

Tommy froze.

Oh. Right. That. That probably explained why he felt like a herd of ravagers had stomped him into the ground. “What happened?” Tommy said, his voice manly and definitely not cracking slightly. And then his back twitched again. Along with the blanket over him.

....that wasn't a blanket, was it?

Tommy craned his neck awkwardly over his shoulder, sucking in a quick breath. Wings. But not the beautiful feathered ones he had dreamed about.

These ones were leathery, scales lining the spines and top edges. The underside was a soft gray but the back and lining were as black as a crow's wing. As he watched, they twitched, shifting up and then down to rest on the bed again. Just on the edge of his vision, he could see another trip of black and gray, gently twitching against the mattress. A tail.

Almost as if he was in a dream, Tommy reached up, tracing over his forehead. He had horns. Honest to prime, horns. “What the fuck.” He whispered.

“An Ender dragon hybrid.” Grian said, beaming when he looked back at his other side. “Xisuma was over the moon, End based hybrids are really rare to find. It's gonna be so cool! I'll reach you how to fly and we can go void gliding together and it'll be so much fun!”

“Huh.” Tommy said, the words slightly choked.

On one hand, it was cool. It was terrifying. On the other...

It didn't feel like him. “Hm.” Tommy said, quiet as he curled in on himself. For so long he was human and now he was so obviously not. Not in the way he had dreamed of, but in a way that was so obviously different.

“We'll help you adjust.” Mumbo promised. “Grian's already planning as much cuddle time as you need.”

Tommy's face flamed red in embarrassment.

“Oh, I never miss cuddle time!” Grian chirped happily. mumbo snorted, one hand carefully wrapping around one of Tommy's.

“I know, I'm pretty sure you cause trouble just so Xisuma and the others will drag you off to your nest for some therapy.” He said fondly. Grian laughed again.

“Maaayyybbee.” Mumbo rolled his eyes but there was something strangely fond about the gesture. Nothing like the condescending eye rolls of Techno or what Wilbur would do when Tommy annoyed him too much. It was weird. Mumbo looked at Tommy, the strange softness back on his face.

“I know it'll be a bit weird to adjust to but we'll be here every step of the way.” He said. Tommy stared at him, for once not quite sure what to say. It made something in his chest curl with delight to hear someone promise that. “Maybe you should get some sleep. You might be a bit tired.”

“But I’m not.” Tommy protested. It came out far too close to a childish whine for his tastes but Tommy tactfully ignored that. He had already done enough sleeping. Now was the time for action! “I don’t want to sleep.”

“Are you sure?” Grian asked. “You just finished growing wings and take it from someone who did, it’s exhausting. Some sleep might help you out a lot.”

“I’m fine.” Tommy whined, starting to squirm. This felt far too close to what Wilbur and Techno used to do when he was younger, They’d trap him in bed, insisting he needed ‘naps’ and that ‘little runts not sleeping would stunt their growth’. It was stupid.

“Why don;t I tell you guys about my current redstone projects then?” Mumbo said. Grian made a wordless cooing noise, settling down. Tommy hesitated for a moment. On one hand, any time spent listening to them was more time spent getting cuddled. But on the other, this was Mumbo’s redstone projects. He didn’t remember all of what he had watched when he was younger but from what he remembered, it had been cool.

“Fine.” Tommy said grouchily, settling down. He would never admit it, would rather die than admit it, but once he got past the strange heavy sensation and the increasing reminder that he didn’t want them to do this, it was comfortable. Cozy. The pressure of them at his sides anchored him in a way that he didn’t know that he needed.

He coughed, almost stifling a warble before Grian nudged him. Neither of the other two seemed to care about the inhuman sound he just made.

“I’m currently working on a better way to automate the music box process.” Mumbo said. “I think the old system I’ve been using is a bit clunky and anyways, I’d love to be able to play songs with music boxes instead of just recording with jukebox discs. So I’ve been using redstone repeaters to-”

And on he goes, through a convoluted explanation that Tommy only half understands and half doesn’t. But Mumbo never insults him for not knowing, instead answering his mumbled questions as if they were real things that deserved answers. It was nice.

The sound of the voice followed him into his sleep, lulling him into dreams that were filled with the glow of redstone and the soft chime of a note block.

And in his dreams, he dreamed of flying. But this time, the one with him had parrot wings.

Chapter End Notes

So, Tommy is an Enderdragon hybrid! Do I win the bet?

Why I chose Enderdragon hybrid: It took a long time to decide but I really liked the alien factor of being a dragon. It's like his dreams of being an avian but a half step off. And I like that, how it both stays the same and yet is completely different. He can fly, he

likes shiny objects, but not like the avian dreams with Phil or the raccoon jokes of Wilbur and Techno. It just made sense to me, adding in a little distance to his past and yet staying close to it.

Small Victories

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Guilt, Emotional Manipulation, mentions of past starvation

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I don’t think all this is fucking necessary.” Tommy said with a grumble. He had finally been allowed to move but not far. He was half propped up on his elbows, pillows providing cushions for his wings. “Shouldn’t these things be cooler or something?”

The nap had improved the pain somewhat, he now felt like he had been trampled by a herd of sheep and not ravagers. But now he was constantly conscious of the heavy wings he now had. Even just shuffling slightly upright had been ungainly with them dragging on him.

Philza had never been so uncoordinated, even when Tommy had woken him up by jumping on him. Each movement of his wings had been strong, controlled. The feathers perfectly groomed and pitch black, big man intimidation. They didn’t flail around like a pair of wet blankets and there was no tail constantly flickering and twitching. He had never nearly rolled off the bed while screeching.

“You just got them, the muscles and nerves are still getting used to them. The scales aren’t quite as hard as they should be but Xisuma said that’s normal for dragon hybrids.” Grian said. He was sitting on the floor now, resting his chin on his hands. “You’re just a little baby fledgeling right now! Of course it’s a little harder.”

“I’m not a baby.” Tommy insisted, cheeks flaming red. Fuck, how long would these stupid things pin him down? “How long is it going to take? For them to be strong enough to do anything.”

“But you are a baby.” Grian insisted, inching closer. “You won’t be able to fly for months, maybe closer to years due to malnourishment and your health lock. You’re still adjusting. Maybe if you were measuring by human player standards and very specific servers, some servers would consider you grown, but multiversal standards? Baby.”

“Months?” Tommy said, spluttering. He glared at the wings like they had personally wronged him which they had. He had been expecting maybe like a day.

Which. Yeah, it wouldn’t be like his dream of Philza teaching him how to fly. No jokes about shoving him off a cliff or crows excitedly mobbing them. None of their whispered conversations in the deep of night while Tommy thought longingly of wings would ever come to pass.

But he could still figure it out himself! How hard could it be? If a chicken could fly, so could the great Tommy Innit!

Grian's eyes darkened. "Don't you dare try flying before that." Tommy flinched at the sudden change of tone and Grian let out a throaty warble that made something in him melt a bit, reaching forward to ruffle Tommy's hair. "Sorry, sore subject for my instincts. If you try flying before you're ready, you could seriously injure or maybe even permanently cripple your wings. There are ways to fix even a near permanent injury, but it'll be painful. I don't want you to go through that."

"I can do it." Tommy grumbled, looking away. Instincts, huh? He didn't want to call Grian out if it wasn't his choice. Techno always got super riled up by instincts.

But he still hated it. Tubbo had been up and bouncing around days after his manifestation. He had barely seemed affected, only stumbling slightly as he got used to his modified legs and the new weight on his head. And here he was, lying in bed, being told it would be months before he could use the wings he had nearly died to get.

What a rip off. 0/10, not Pog at all. Could have used an Elytra.

"You'll get there eventually." Grian promised. "After a few days, you'll be strong enough to support their weight walking around. Once you're strong enough, we'll start you on wing exercises and then work our way up from there. I know all kinds of fun tricks so don't listen to Zedaph or False when they say they can teach you better."

"I won't be around in a few months though." Tommy said, letting out a groan of frustration as he buried his head in the mattress. Completely missing how Grian froze, eyes dark and wings stiff. "Maybe I should just take a lead out of Quack's book and strap them down."

That might have been his best idea of the day. Quackity had pinned his wings for most of his time as Vice President, yeah? Tommy had seen him do it during Pogtopia. He had them out for a while during the beginning but then he and Wilbur had fought and Quackity had hidden them away again. Tommy had helped him once or twice in adjusting the way the straps fit so that the wings stayed hidden under a slightly oversized shirt.

Quackity had said there was magic in them to compress his wings so small but it wouldn't be too hard to remake the straps he had seen. Then he'd at least pin his wings instead of dealing with the random twitches. They were close to belts, but modified to be wider and fit a bit more snug. If he did it right, he wouldn't be carrying giant targets around on his back anymore. Maybe his tail too, for now.

Nothing for Dream to cut away. Nothing for withers to hit.

Tommy was brought out of his musings by a clawed hand grabbing his chin. Grian let out a warning hiss, wings glared, and Tommy warbled back, eyes clouding over.

"Don't even think about doing that." Grian said. Tommy shivered under the fierce gaze of their other, their eyes so dark that it looked like pieces of the void were trapped within. "Do you understand? No straps. Ever."

Tommy jerkily nodded. As soon as Grian let go of him, he shuffled backwards across the bed, heart thudding against his ribs. Warbles and hisses slipped from his mouth unhindered.

“Oh fledgling, I’m so sorry.” Grian said, reaching forward. His wings dropped low, feathers fluffed but no longer intimidating.

Tommy couldn’t breath, every time he forced himself together, what came out was utterly inhuman. No words, just fear. Distantly, he knew that he shouldn’t be able to make these sounds, that this should be agony on his throat. And yet, they slipped free nonetheless.

“Grian, I leave for a little while and you’ve already spooked the living daylights out of him.” The door clicked open, and Tommy stiffened as Mumbo walked through. Would he get in trouble with him too? Mumbo and Grian seemed to be best friends. Would it be like fighting the Dream Team again?

“I wasn’t trying to scare him, he just brought up wing straps and I.. panicked I guess.” Grian said, slumping more until he was a puddle of sad parrot hybrid.

“Maybe you should step out for a bit then, buddy. Go see Scar and Stress.” Mumbo said, sitting down on the floor. “I think it’ll be good for you to talk to someone for a bit. You’ve been sitting in here for days.”

“But-“

“Go outside. Maybe work on the back of you mansion.” Mumbo said, nudging Grian slightly. “You need to settle down slightly, I’ll explain things to him.”

Grian looked at Tommy sadly but obeyed, slowly trudging out the door. Tommy didn’t relax, watching him go before turning his suspicious look upon Mumbo.

“He really is sorry, he wouldn’t have enjoyed scaring you.” Mumbo said, busying himself with carefully arranging the bowl onto the blankets without Tommy’s wings swatting it off the bed. They had already learned that lesson once.

“Then why did he do it?” Tommy challenged. Why look at him with such... he couldn’t describe it, even after thinking about it. It wasn’t quite anger. Not bitter or spiteful. But there had been something dangerous in how Grian looked at him, something familiar and yet not.

Mumbo frowned, rubbing at his forehead. “Well, for one, fear. Strapping down wings could heavily damaged them. You’re pinning down muscle and bone in one spot for a long time. It risks breaking the bones or being unable to use them because the muscles lose their strength after too long. It’s even more dangerous because your wings have just grown in.”

“Huh.” Tommy said. He realized he had relaxed and forced himself to tense again, not willing to be defenseless. Not just yet.

“And well.” Mumbo looked away, continuing to fiddle with the bowl. “Grian has had bad experience with wing straps too. It took quite a while for him to open up about it. But it doesn’t- he has a bad reaction still. With the claustrophobia and pain that happened. Bringing

it up reminds him of that. He'll likely need some time with another hermit for a while to work through them again."

Oh. Uh. That made him feel a bit guilty. Tommy grimaced, glancing away himself and completely missing how Mumbo glanced at him, gauging his reaction. "But, uh--"

"Grian might not talk about it much but he was excited you turned out to have wings. He wants to give you the experience he wanted to have when he just manifested." Mumbo said, leaning back with a sigh. "He worries about you. And hearing you talk about strapping down your wings? It scared him."

"But that doesn't make it fair." Tommy challenged, mentally grimacing about how childish he sounded. Saying it wasn't fair.

But it was hard to feel angry with Mumbo's words swirling around his head. He wanted to be angry and Prime knows he had the right.

But it didn't feel quite right. Grian just wanted him to be happy. And it sounded like the other guy had been pretty fucked up by things in his past. Maybe he could just kind of treat it as a Wilbur thing. When the other had gotten spastic and overprotective and mad towards anyone who even hinted they wanted to spend time with Tommy.

At least Grian didn't threaten to lock him in a closet when they got mad. Pogtopia Wilbur had not been fun at all.

"He just wants you to be safe." Mumbo said. "Just. Don't bring up the straps again. I'll ask him to make it up to you later."

"He better." Tommy grumbled. Maybe he could scan something cool out of it. Like netherite.

Maybe he'd drop the straps. For now, so Grian wouldn't freak out again. Or maybe for forever. Quackity hadn't mentioned the risk of wing damage, but he hadn't want to talk about the straps much either.

He didn't quite like the wings, they had been a massive pain. Literally. And being told it would be months or even years before he could use them? Sucked majorly.

But he didn't exactly want to injure himself. No permanently. As much as some assholes would claim otherwise, he wasn't an idiot. He had never (the pillar) wanted to hurt himself.

The wings might be weird, clunky and all around annoying. They might drag and make him feel a bit like a floppy noodle. But they were his and one day he wanted to fly. To catch the same exhilaration that he had felt on the elytra.

"They just don't seem very practical for fighting though." Tommy complained, accepting the bowl and propping himself up a bit more. Before he could finish, Mumbo carefully pushed a pillow over as well and Tommy used it as an arm rest. It felt a little silly but it worked. "How are you supposed to keep them from being hurt?"

"...Nobody goes after them?"

Tommy scoffed, motioning at the wings with one hand. "They're massive fucking targets, big man." He said, ignoring Mumbo's chides. Father figure or not, the swearing won't stop. "You can't tell me that no one goes after them after a fight."

"They won't? That would be like going after a feline hybrid's tail or a merling's gills." Mumbo said. His eyes widened when he saw Tommy's skepticism increase by a hundredfold. "None of the hermits would go after your wings!"

"Yeah, but what about outside of Hermitcraft?" Tommy said. He still kind of doubted Mumbo's assertion but that little voice was gradually getting a bit... easier to ignore. Stupidly. Even when the hermits had gotten mad or sad, they had never hurt them. They were practically a bunch of pushovers. Grian, the Dreamslayer himself, went from weird mad to sad and guilty in like two seconds.

Ugh. This was way too complicated to think about.

"Why would you need to know that?" Mumbo said. He shrugged at Tommy's eye roll. "Most of us don't leave except to visit competitions and even then, we keep to ourselves. You could ask False and Grian, I suppose, what they do for tournaments."

"Fine." Tommy mumbled, glancing down at the bowl. Or he could just ask Philza when he got back. If the guy didn't still hate him at least. He had never seen Philza with wing armor or strapping them down but surely there was some method?

Dream would be mad if he came back with wings. Wilbur said that was why Philza couldn't join in the beginning, because Dream didn't want flight on his server.

He forced his thoughts back to the bowl, trying to keep away from the gruesome ideas playing in his head on what Dream might do. Mushroom stew again. Fuck, he wanted applesauce. He took a bit and nearly spat it out. He tried to swallow and finally did spit it out.

It tasted positively acrid now. Like someone had burned dirt, mixed it with spit, and then dropped a whole heaping pile of salt on top. And then left that in a cave to ferment and go rotten for a hundred years. He tried another bite and nearly gagged trying to force it down, tears beginning to well from the effort.

When he tried to go back for another bite, a hand reached out, pulling the bowl away. "What are you doing, mate? If you hate it, don't eat it." Mumbo scolded, holding the bowl out of his reach.

"Why does it taste so bad?" Tommy said, licking the blanket to rid the taste from his mouth. Tasted like wool. "You use a subpar crafting table or something?"

"No, just a normal one? Are subpar crafting tables even a thing?" Mumbo said, frowning. He chuckled at Tommy's mischievous look.

"Absolutely, big man. You never had a subpar crafting table? Absolutely horrible they are, can ruin your whole day. Not that I've ever built any, my crafting tables are always top of the line. Call me Tommy Best Crafting Table Ever Innit." Tommy said, smirking.

Mumbo chuckled again. "I suppose I'll quite have to, if you can do that." He said. He glanced down at the bowl of soup. "And no, it was a normal crafting table. I even ate some myself while we were waiting for you to wake up, there wasn't a lot of time to cook."

"You gotta be kidding." Tommy said, glaring at the soup bowl. That had been absolutely disgusting and not in a poison kind of way. If they had to poison it, it at least could taste good. "What is up with your mushrooms then?"

"I'm not sure." Mumbo said, looking at the bowl. "It tasted fine to me, I'm not sure why it disagrees with you so much. I can go see about getting you another bowl?"

"Fine." Tommy said, grouchy. He slumped forward on the pillow. It felt like his stomach was trying to twist itself into knots. He had been getting ravenous so fast ever since manifesting.

Grian and Mumbo said it had been normal but it still felt weird. During exile, he hadn't exactly avoided food, but he hadn't really felt the need to eat either. And now here he was, miserable if he didn't eat every few hours.

It felt... weak. Terrifying. He had been proud of his ability to go a long time without food. It had been essential to surviving 2b2t and even the days with Philza and the rest hadn't completely erased it. He either over ate or ate nothing at all, and during exile, nothing of all had become... habit. Tubbo would have been pissed if he had known.

And yet, all that. Gone. Wiped away as if it had never existed.

At least he could leverage it into good things. "Or applesauce."

"You're not supposed to be eating that too much. All the magic is bad for you." Mumbo said. Tommy slumped further into the blanket, the very picture of misery.

"You're so mean." He whined. "All I want, after getting my back ripped apart, is some tasty applesauce but noooo, Mumbo says I can't have any."

At least he could still fake tears like a pro!

Mumbo waved but held firm. "You should get Bdubs or Scar to give you tips on that." He mumbled. Tommy groaned, burying his head in the blanket with a soft thump. Of course the hermits had to be immune to his puppy dog eyes. Why not? "I'll see what I can do. I'm sure we have normal applesauce somewhere."

"Family status revoked." Tommy mumbled into the blanket. Mumbo Jumbo himself had betrayed him. This truly was the darkest of timelines. No one would be able to cure his pain. He had thought of the man like an uncle, his own brother, someone he could trust. And yet, here he was, betrayed and broken, his trust by someone he thought as a father-

"What was that?"

Tommy's head shot up. "Nothing." He said. "Only that I couldn't believe you betrayed me."

“It’s for your own good.” Mumbo said, waving a finger at him. He walked towards the door, strangely pausing just before it. “Grian? Step away from the door.”

At that, there was a surprised chirp and a thumping noise. When Mumbo opened the door, Tommy could see Grian sprawled in the ground, Ren sitting cross legged across the hall. He waved at Tommy.

“Are you kidding me?” Tommy griped, pushing himself up. “I thought you had left because you felt bad! What is this shit!”

“I agree, I thought we agreed you were going to go neat for a bit and calm down with the others.” Mumbo said, raising an eyebrow.

“But I was! And then I realized, a hallway is a perfect place to nest! Think about it, you get to see people come by, it’s close to the kitchen, you get to trip people when they get too close. It’s basically the best spot ever.” Grian said, leaning forward. There was a blanket haphazardly wrapped around him.

“You get to trip people?” Tommy hesitated, glancing out at the hallway and then down at the bed. That did sound cooler than his current nest.

“It’s not fun on the back though.” Ren pointed out, stretching. Tommy winced, glancing at his wings. Ugh, that would ruin the fun. Terrible, hallways needed to be built better. “I’ve got seven cricks already just from sitting here.”

“Right, we’ll, I need to go craft another bowl of soup for Tommy.” Mumbo said with a sniff. “The first one went bad somehow.”

“Are you sure it did?” Ren threw up his hands when all three stared at him. “I’m just saying, tons of things can happen when you first manifest. I remember my new sense of smell made me dizzy. Maybe Tommy just can’t tolerate the taste now that he’s manifested.”

“Are you for real? You gotta be kidding me.” Tommy said. That couldn’t be true? Could it? He had never heard of crafted food tasting worse after manifesting but Ren seemed so confident and it was true that Philza always tended to be picky about their food, insisting they shouldn’t eat rotting meat and spider eyes.

It was true, he hadn’t really eaten any soup yet because he knocked the first bowl over. So it could be possible.

But still, something itches at him.

But Grian was already nodding along like it made perfect sense. “I’m not surprised, the stuff is pretty terrible. I’m sure almost anything else would be more tolerable.”

“I could try getting something else from the kitchen then.” Mumbo suggested. He paused, glancing down with a frown. “But soup really is the best thing right now, Zedaph said his stomach might be too weak for bulkier food.”

“Maybe you could get some from the pot of soup Stress and Doc made for everyone?” Ren suggested, glancing at Tommy. “I know you aren’t a fan of home cooked stuff but you really do need to eat some food and that’s the best option to try.”

Tommy opened his mouth to say no, the fear of poison still lingering. Eating it would be a favor, he’d be trusting his food to the hermits completely. Not even the faintest cover by just getting the crafted stuff, no, he’d be getting it cooked for him. Like Philza used to do. He wanted to say no, force down the crafted soup like he used to.

But his stomach lurched, reminding him that it was about to revolt and start shivving his other organs. He needed to eat and from how Ren was talking, this was the last option. “Fine.” He said, glaring at the blanket. “You probably would have killed me by now anyways.”

“We would never kill you.” Grian swore. “Never.”

The first bite of soup was as delicious as he remembered. But it still tasted like defeat.

Chapter End Notes

It’s true some hybrids experience sensory changes, including taste. Crafted foods specific? Ender dragon hybrids? Ehhhhhhhhh, not exactly.... Common.

Best food is food cooked with love, so they say.

Open the Floodgates

Chapter Notes

:)

Trigger warnings: Mentions of isolation, someone (Tommy) getting overwhelmed by social situations, mild dysphoria in that Tommy feels weird about their ability to make dragon sounds

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Mumbo, tell Grian to let me sit up, I’m bored.” Tommy whined. Prime, this was the absolute worst. He didn’t want to do that much! Just sit up, maybe stretch out his legs a bit. But from how Grian reacted, you would have thought that he had tried to jump into lava.

“But what if you pull something? Your wings are so fragile right now.” Grian said, pacing. “Come on, it’s not that bad. Just stay in the nest, Tommy.”

He made an odd warbling noise that made Tommy’s head feel foggy for a moment before he shook it away. “But I’m bored.” Tommy insisted. “I must tend to my many wives and be the biggest of men. I can’t do that from bed, Grian.”

“But you’re not married?” Mumbo said, glancing up from his Comm. He had been fiddling with it for most of the hour, saying that he needed to update some people on stuff. Probably complaining about how Grian was such a massive jerk.

“But that’s where you’re wrong, Mr Mumbo Jumbo. For I have many wives.” Tommy tried to push himself up, hissing with frustration as Grian leapt forward to push him back down. He clamped his mouth shut, fuming at himself.

It had been harder and harder not to let the more animalistic sounds slip. It had been embarrassing enough when he was still tired and hungry. But now he was awake and raring to go and his mouth was being weird.

Sharp words became snarls. Hums seemed to vibrate deep in his chest now. He had chirped, once, when Ren had brought him an apple and Grian had been vibrating with happiness. And he couldn’t seem to stop it. Every time he got close to clamping a lid on it and speaking right, he’d lose track of his thoughts and his brain would decide to hit the lizard button.

It was stupid and he hated it. Dream and Wilbur would have taunted him for being unable to speak like a person. Tommy glared at the blanket, fuming over the slip. Tubbo rarely bleated anymore after Wilbur had gone into a rage over the similarity the sounds had with Schlatt. Even Fundy had dropped the yips and barks of his childhood to be taken seriously.

And here he was, still struggling to get it together. In front of the hermits. Grian and Ren did it, yeah, but that was different. The hermits were fucking bizarre. Tommy wouldn't be taken seriously on the Dream SMP if he was constantly hissing or warbling or whatever his brain decided was good.

Mumbo and Grian exchanged looks, mistaking the target of his frustration. "Ren, do you still have Tommy's Comm? I can invite him into the world net so he can see the chat and uploads sections."

"Oh, shit, really?" Tommy said, perking up a bit. That would be fantastic. He'd finally get a glimpse at the world chat and be able to check for any funky stuff brewing. And maybe there would be funny videos.

He paused. "Are you sure the admin would be okay with that?" He said, scowling. He didn't want to get into trouble because Mumbo set him up even though Mumbo was the biggest of men who had never done anything wrong. But it had taken almost two weeks before Dream added him to the Dream SMP world chat. And only because he kept stealing other people's comms and using their chat account to say cool things in the main chat.

In his defense, it had been funny.

"I don't see why not." Ren said, Tommy's Comm dropping into his hand with a flash of light. "I'm pretty sure Xisuma's already set up a chat account, it just needs to be activated. We would have done it sooner but the manifestation came up."

"I could do all sorts of hacking stuff." Tommy pointed out, glancing between them. Is this one of those weird 'we're not like other servers' moments.

Maybe it was dumb of him to remind them that you could hack if you had a world chat account but he couldn't help it. He wanted to be taken seriously. Wanted to push and prod until they were actually cautious.

But Grian just shrugged, making grabby hands for the Comm. "Xisuma has locked down any hacks." He dismissed. He let out a sharp chirp as Mumbo snagged the Comm first.

"Oh, hush you." Mumbo said. He pulled Grian into his side with his free arm, ignoring how the avian latched on in a brutal hug. "And he's right, Xisuma has set up firewalls for any kind of hack. If you actually succeeded, we'd have to take the Comm away though."

Ugh. Tommy grimaced. "He can't do that." He pointed out but it sounded weak even to his ears. He had giant wet blankets stapled to his back and iron tools. If Xisuma wanted, he could just ban him from the server without batting an eye. And it wasn't like they hadn't stolen his Comm before.

"It's for your own good." Ren promised. "Hacking the server isn't safe and you could get hurt."

"Ugh, you sound just like him." Tommy said. Philza had been such a nag when he had taken away his hack clients. He had been grounded for almost a week afterwards when he tried to

take them back, unable to set foot out of the nest and no access to a Comm.

Ren eyed Tommy curiously but was thankfully distracted by Mumbo's cry of triumph. "There we go! One activated chat account."

Tommy eagerly swiped the Comm as soon as it was handed to him. He checked the uploads section first, wanting to get a lay of the land. Any video clips people took could be posted to uploads.

But the Hermits channel was kind of weird.

It had been a long time since anyone on the Dream SMP had uploaded a clip that wasn't a subtle threat or a mockery. There was maybe a new video every month, usually showing off weapons or traps. But the Hermit videos revolve around building and jokes. Most had a screenshot paused on someone laughing or a particular piece of architecture.

Even weirder were how many there were and how recent. There had to be hundreds of videos in uploads. Tommy kept scrolling and scrolling but he never hit the bottom.

Dream SMP had had like a hundred max.

"Oh, those are some of the oldies." Ren said, leaning over to watch the screen. Tommy jumped slightly, manfully resisting the urge to hide his screen. "If you go back a bit further, you'll see stuff from season seven."

"It goes back that far?" Tommy said, mystified. How much had they uploaded? Why?

Not that it wasn't kind of cool. Just a little bit. Fuck, if he could download even just a few of these, he'd be the talk of the multiverse. The hermits were, well, fucking hermits. They occasionally uploaded videos but very rarely and most were tutorials that looked like magic half the time. They would spread like wildfire, people eagerly sharing them and chatting about how they would love to meet them.

But the videos he was seeing were more... relaxed. Calm. Alive. Tommy kept scrolling, watching as outfits and buildings changed.

He paused on one clip. One of the oldest dates he had seen, there was a marker on it that said it had been reuploaded, probably someone resharing an old video.

'Impulse's first day!'

But it was the picture that really caught his question. Some guy with brown hair, wrapped up in a hug by Xisuma, a guy with red eyes and golden skin boxing him in on the other side. The brown haired guy pressed his hands to Xisuma's armor like he was trying to pull him closer. Or desperately trying to push him away, their eyes wide and panicked. Their feet planted like they were trying to lean away, mouth open like they were yelling.

Ren rumbled. "Oh yeah, I remember that." He said, leaning over. Tommy's hand tightened on his Comm. "Impulse was really panicky when he first arrived. He kept having panic attacks and it would take hours to coax him down from them. I don't think he went a single day

without being in someone's arms. It was nice. I should ask him if he needs help like that again, he usually goes to Zedaph and Tango."

Tommy paused, looking down at the clip again. Impulse didn't look any less terrified and unwilling. But maybe that was normal? He didn't like people touching him during his panic attacks either but the hermits had used that to calm him down before. "Why not stop if he's so scared?"

"Well, he needed it." Mumbo said, shrugging. "The best way to calm someone down is pressure, knowing someone's there and that they are absolutely safe and guarded. It helps get them used to safety again. We might be hermits but we're very rarely alone."

That... didn't quite seem right to him? But it did sound similar to what Wilbur and them did when they first found him. It took forever before he got used to the smothering, the slight dependence, the inability to go for.

That must be more normal than he thought. He'd never tell Philza that though. Fucker still locked down some of his favorite Comm functions.

His comm pinged in his hands and he glanced down at it. The chat button was lit up and hesitantly, Tommy clicked on it.

GoodTimesWithScar died from fall damage

Zombiecleo: Lol, rip

JoeHills: How did you not see the cliff

JoeHills: It was right there

GoodTimesWithScar: I was distracted!

GoodTimesWithScar: On my way back, keep my stuff from despawning

ZombieCleo: Already in a chest

****Tommyinnit has joined the chat!****

ZombieCleo: Hey, new kid!

JoeHills: Welcome to chaos

GoodTimesWithScar: Don't scare him off! Hi Tommy!

ZombieCleo: You wouldn't have to be worried about me scaring him off if you didn't keep him all to yourself>:(

ImpulseSV: Vouch

Zedaph: I'm gonna meet him soon?

ImpulseSV: Still vouching

Even as he watched, the Comm kept vibrating, more messages coming through. It was kind of bizarre to see it so active.

It wasn't like nobody used the chat section on the Dream SMP. In fact, it was pretty active! But it wasn't this... casual. Loud. Most people kept the bulk of their chatting to private channels.

You never knew what other people would do if they took a bad chat wrong. There were a few chats, important messages, but not like this. Before exile, Tommy had been carrying the world chat on his back, constantly bugging people through it. It was nicer that way, even if he rarely got answers.

After exile, Dream had muted him on the world chat. Said that his comments were annoying and he shouldn't be bugging people while he was exiled for 'bad behavior'.

(Was that when people had stopped loving him? When they couldn't see or hear him anymore, did he just vanish from their thoughts? Even if they promised to keep him there forever?)

It buzzed again, drawing Tommy's attention back. He should probably type something in, yeah? Can't keep them waiting for too long. The others were thankfully quiet, checking stuff on their own comms. Leaving him to take this step on his own.

iJevin: I can't believe you already scared him off.

ZombieCleo: Did not

ZombieCleo: Tell him Grian

Grian: I'm not saying anything

Grian: I plead the fifth

ZombieCleo: We don't even have that here??

Grian: Of course we do. Obviously.

GoodTimesWithScar: Yeah Cleo I can't believe you don't know about our fifth rule

TangoTek: Right up there with Scar's death count and hide your doors from Grian

Grian: If you don't want them stolen, don't leave them out

Tommyinnit: Why are you stealing doors

If he thought it was weird before, the chat went wild, comm buzzing constantly in his hand. It was weird but... nice. No one on the Dream SMP had ever been this excited to see him in the chat.

Grian: Consider. If they didn't want their doors stolen, why leave them out

TangoTek: Because they're a door?

Grian: Your point

TangoTek: Give me my door back

Grian: No

GoodTimesWithScar: Fair enough, guess you just lose

Tommyinnit: Just big man things, you can't understand I guess rip Tango

TangoTek: I just want my door back

ZombieCleo: Hey Tommy how's the manifest going?

Tommyinnit: Walk in the park

Grian: He's tried to sit up five times now and nearly fallen off the bed four times

ZombieCleo: Oh you broke Grian's record then

Grian: HEY

StressMonster: No, Grian fell off the bed twice.

“I can’t believe you’re a hypocrite.” Tommy teased, drawing out the last word. Grian went red, rolling his eyes. “Telling me not to move around too much and then doing the exact different thing. Absolutely terrible.”

He steadied his wrists on the pillow, trying not to concentrate on the way his stomach churned and twisted. Why was he feeling so weirded out about this? So reluctant to check the messages flying by?

There was a time when he was excited to see new messages in the chat. Why was it so hard to look at them now? Why couldn’t he make himself respond? In Dream SMP, he would have monopolized the chat by now.

Three messages is fine, he told himself. It’s fine. Don’t annoy them right now, not when you just entered in.

“It wasn’t that bad.” He grumbled, glaring down at the comm. Tommy jolted, looking away from his own. “I had a few months with my wings before I entered the server. I was older than you too.”

“I don’t know, it was pretty bad. If it wasn’t for Zedaph and the other winged hybrids, you could’ve hurt yourself pretty badly.” Mumbo said, looking up from his Comm. Judging by the muted sound, he and Ren were watching videos. “He got grounded for a few months to keep him safe because he kept trying to jump off of things.”

Tommy jolted at that part but none of the hermits seemed to mind. Mumbo continued: “Stressed everyone out quite a lot. You reap what you sow really, now you get to see what it was like for us.”

“And you know what? I listened and now I can fly whenever I want. And Tommy’s going to listen and one day, he’ll do the same.” Grian said. “So, hush. I’m fine.”

“Don’t see why I can’t try now.” Tommy said grumbling. His wings were a bit bigger than Grian’s anyways. Didn’t that mean they were fully grown or something? He didn’t know much about flying hybrids. Philza had always said he’d teach him everything he needed to know. “Shouldn’t I be done with the whole manifesting thing?”

“That’s why Zedaph and Xisuma are coming over in a bit.” Grian said, checking his Comm again when it pinged. “Pretty soon actually. To check how it’s going.”

“But that doesn’t answer my question. Shouldn’t I be done by now?” It hadn’t taken Tubbo this long to be back on his feet, even with his legs getting changed. Why was it taking so long for him?

“Manifesting varies a lot.” Ren said, not looking up. “Some people go through it faster, some people go through it slower. Xisuma slowed it down as much as he could.”

“But why?”

“Without the code lock, you would have been done by now. If he let it happen at the pace your body wanted, you would have died a lot throughout the process.” Ren said. “Any slower and it likely would have hurt you, but any faster and it could have killed you too. You’re a tough pup to have gotten through that without dying. But there’s still some slower developing features that don’t appear during the initial process.”

“Of course, Tommy never dies.” Tommy said, puffing out his chest. “Not even to manifesting. Can’t kill me.”

“Of course not.” Grian said before warbling. Tommy disguised a hiss with a soft cough, hoping they wouldn’t notice. Unluckily, Grian paused, face scrunching up in confusion as he began opening his mouth.

Thankfully, at that moment, the doors slid open again. “Big X!” Tommy said, pushing himself up and then squawking as Grian nudged him back down. He paused, seeing someone new follow the admin in. “Who’s this?”

“Hello, Tommy! I’ve been told so much about you!” The other said, practically vibrating in excitement. On first glance, they seemed nondescript. Pale blonde hair and brown eyes. Simple brown clothes. He probably could’ve named a handful of players with similar features.

But on second glance, he saw the wings.

Not like his wings. They were scaled, yeah, and they had the same ridges and spines, but that was where the similarities ended. Where his scales were matte black with patches of silvery grey, theirs were black. In fact, black wasn’t a good descriptor. Their scales were so black that it seemed to pull light in until his eyes ached to look at them.

And then he blinked and they were gone.

“My name is Zedaph!” The new person said, holding a hand out to shake. Tommy stared at him in mute confusion. If anyone from the Dream SMP was there, they probably would have called it a miracle to see Tommy finally shocked silent.

“Are you an Ender dragon?” Tommy said, squinting at where the wings had been. His eyes seemed to slide off where they could be and he hissed irritably.

“Something similar.” Zedaph said with a shrug, leaning against the wall. “Similar enough that between Xisuma and me, we’ve been working out roughly how you should be developing and such. False too, but they’re more of a fiery rawr kind of dragon so it’s hard generalizing their knowledge to you.”

“I promised you this would be as easy as possible.” Xisuma added. “This is part of that.”

“But isn’t that like already worked out and shit?” Tommy said, glancing at Grian. “Couple months and I can try flying. Easy. Couple of slower bits but they’ll show up.”

“That’s how avians do it.” Grian said with a shrug. “But Ender dragons are rare and hybrids are even rarer. I can’t say for sure.”

“I mean the breath weapon, if you get it, will take a few months to develop, let alone master.” Zedaph said, continuing without pausing for breath. “And then we got the tail and the wings to contend with and all in all, you could be working through the manifestation for a couple years. And that’s not tossing in the differences in aging because dragon hybrids can get very weird in that regard-“

“Wait, hold on. Breath weapon? Tail? Fucking years?” Tommy said. He snorted, tapping his fingers against the pillow. He could figure out the flying thing but what the nether was the rest of the stuff? He got a breath weapon? The fuck was that? “Fucking Prime. You’re gonna need to give me notes, I can’t stick around for that long.”

The room was quiet. Tommy’s eyes narrowed, his claws puncturing through the pillow. “Ya know?”

“We’ve been meaning to talk to you about that.” Xisuma said. Was it just him or did it suddenly get harder to breath in here? “You’re going to be staying longer.”

Chapter End Notes

Short yes, but I really wanted to leave the cliffhanger there. Worth it.

Also Tommy finally got a peek at chat! That’s gonna be fun later.

A Contract Made

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings: Some Tommy rambling (he's got a lot of guilt and anxiety lurking under that rabid confidence), minor victim blaming (Tommy mildly thinks better he's the victim than others), instinct manipulation, nonconsensual touching

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

This time the pillow, comforter, whatever the fuck they called it really did tear as Tommy's claws tore through it cleanly, stuffing beginning to fall away from the slashes. "What the fuck do you mean." He spat. He wanted it to sound vicious, spiteful but instead it came out so... empty. Almost tired.

Part of him expected this. The possibility of betrayal. He couldn't count on any outsiders. Couldn't get any sort of help. Help came with a price, came with strings attached. He could count on his hands the number of times people had helped him and never expected anything in return.

In 2b2t, it was slavery or all of your loot being torn away from you. In SMP Earth, it was a forced alliance or a treaty so lopsided that it was practically thievery. In Hypixel, it was the fighting rings. In Dream SMP, it was death or exile. The last time he had been forced to pay a price himself, he had to give up his discs, the first he had ever found himself.

What would the Hermits demand?

"Maybe I should start from a bit of an easier point." Xisuma said, his Comm disappearing in a flash of light. "Why do you want to go back so quickly?"

"Because it's my home." Tommy hissed. And gods was that weird to actually hiss, to have his voice take on a sharp whispery effect. Kind of cool. Maybe. And weird. "It might not have fancy buildings or elytra, or other shitty stuff, but it's home."

"Okay, easier point then." Xisuma said. Tommy rolled his eyes. Grian chuckled, a slightly strained laugh. "Why so fast? Why not let yourself stay here and let us take care of you? You're heavily malnourished and underweight for your height and age. The last two times you ate, you complained of being too full after eating but the amount we gave you was half the size of the meal you should be eating and we only did it that way so you wouldn't strain your stomach wound. You're heavily injured and have quite a lot of scar tissue. Enough to suggest either abuse, actual war, or both."

He held his hand, not flinching under Tommy's glare.

“Grian’s told me how nervous you’ve been.” Tommy whipped his head around to glare at Grian who fucking shrugged. Shrugged! Was this what the asshole was doing on his comms? Ratting him out and making him sound like a scaredy cat? “Asking about wing armor of all things. You’ve just finished your manifestation and health locked, if anything injured your new features, it could be catastrophic. And so I ask you, why do you want to leave so quickly?”

Tommy opened his mouth to reply, to spit vitriol and anger about the other daring to question his decision. But the words stuck in his mouth, burying down deep and refusing to come out.

Deep down, the instincts that had dragged him through 2b2t, the ones that let him get as far as he did, told him to stay. The same ones that had driven him to create Business Bay and later to take the offer of the one and only SBI, the ones focused on survival and damn the consequences for others.

Because if the hermits were honest, if they truly weren’t lying, then he would be safe here. Maybe better than safe. Maybe it would even be like being with Philza and Wilbur and Techno, the days where he didn’t have to worry about food, or getting hurt, or where he was going to sleep that night. Maybe this time, it will be permanent.

And secretly, he had kind of dreamed of it. Once. Or twice. Maybe more than a few times. Everyone kind of did. Of the big servers, the famous ones that only picked the very best and most interesting, offering you an invitation. The ones with the interesting mods, or the coolest buildings, or the kind of people who were the life of the tournament even if they didn’t always win. And yeah, maybe once or twice he thought about meeting Mumbo or another hermit and befriending them.

His instincts didn’t care about the ruin that would be left behind. That he was supposed to be better than that vicious little scavenger that had clawed his way into getting an invitation out of 2b2t and later into the SBI. If he had gotten an offer like this a few years ago, an offer that was straight out of his childhood daydreams, he would have accepted it straight away.

But his heart didn’t care. Dream SMP was supposed to be it. His and Tubbo’s and Wilbur’s place, after Techno and Philza had gotten distracted with their own projects. When the visits had dwindled slightly and invitations for family time had been turned down with excuses made and sad smiles.

He could still see it like yesterday. How Wilbur had shaken him awake with a mischievous smile and pushed him into putting on warmer clothes and packing a small bag. Tubbo leaned against the door, still drowsy and yawning as he clutched his bag to his chest.

If they won’t value you, then your mine alone, Wilbur had whispered. The triumph in his voice had made Tommy preen, sleepy but proud.

Dream SMP was supposed to be where they made their mark and fuck, Wilbur should have. Had sung a country out of nothing and then burned it to the ground. Their home is nothing but a crater and their brother six feet under. It was where Tommy had become a warrior, where he had lost two lives, and where been exiled.

He should hate it. Some part of him did, the angry bundle of instincts and spiteful anger that whispered that his (former) family had lied. That server had been nothing but misfortune and pain.

But he craved it all the same. The same server that had given him a nephew. A country that was filled with friends and family. A country that he had sworn to protect and that was all he had left of his dead brother.

L'Manburg, Tubbo, Quackity, Fundy, they didn't understand that Dream wasn't done. They hadn't heard Dream's words, too calm to be rants, but dripping with vitriol all the same. The other truly, sincerely, hated the new country that had formed on his server. Tommy's exile was a way to torment him and keep him far away from protecting his friends but it had distracted Dream. Deep down, he knew that was all he could give them sometimes.

With the distraction of Tommy gone, Wilbur dead, who would Dream turn to next? Tubbo, who was so tired of war that he had given up Tommy to a tyrant? Fundy, the son of the man who hated? Or maybe Quackity, another one of the revolutionaries. Or Niki or Jack or Ranboo or so many people on this server and none who had a clue of what would happen next. He had to go back and help them.

Maybe they hadn't been there for him, maybe they hadn't even messaged or visited or cared-shut up. Dream was probably being a bitch again. Or it was glitched.

If he left, everything he fought for and the exile he suffered through, would be for nothing. Dream would win, Tubbo and his friends would suffer, and he'd... what? Go around pretending he was one of the hermits? Waiting until they inevitably got tired of him like everyone else did?

Every day could be the day that Tubbo lost his last life and was trapped on that shitty server as a ghost. Or the day that Dream finally destroyed L'Manburg. Fuck, every day that Dream spent in charge was a major loss because the green bitch was an asshole in general who played with those kind of rules.

(If he took this, he'd prove Dream right. That he really was a selfish child who hurt the others around him.)

"It's my home." Tommy said finally, the only way he could really sum it up. Because he had no idea how he could explain the churning mess that was his thoughts right now. "It might not be hermitcraft but it's home and I need to go back there. My friends will miss me."

Grian let out a low crooning noise, not resisting as Mumbo pulled him into a side hug. "If your server is unhealthy or abusive, you can talk to us about it." He said. "We've dealt with it before, the admin council alone has many laws about appropriate practices within the server."

Tommy couldn't help himself. He laughed. "I don't fucking need that." He said. "My server isn't abusive or unhealthy or whatever. I just want to go home, yeah?"

He didn't want to see whatever fucked up punishments an 'admin council' would come up with when they found out he had left the punishment his own admin had set him. Was Dream

being a little bitch who was only offended because Tommy scorched the house of his best friend? Fuck yeah. Would those prissy admins care? Most definitely not.

The worst people in his life had always been admins. Josh, who had grieved his base and cheated when Business Bay had justifiably gone after him for revenge. The 2b2t admins who honestly could give less of a shit about what happened on the server and in fact, could be some of the worst.

Dream. Just. In general. Dream.

A whole council of admins would probably be a fucking nightmare. Xisuma had been okayish but he had only known him for like, two weeks. Three days if he counted all the time they actually spent together. Even Dream had managed not to be a massive bastard for the first two weeks. He had a good feeling that bringing a council of admins would just make the entire situation worse.

He knew for a fact that Dream was a very very good liar. Who would believe a bunch of nobodies over one of the best speedrunners and the champion of several tournaments?

“I- Tommy, you have to know most of what you described isn’t okay, right?” Grian said, a strange edge to his voice. “I mean, just offhand, your admin sounds terrible and your server isn’t providing for basic needs like food. And like, some servers, that’s okay, but not when you have younger players running around who don’t know much about building farms and creating stable supply. That’s messed up?”

“Not everyone can build huge fancy redstone farms. I got by just fine.” Tommy said stubbornly. He didn’t have much of an appetite a lot, and even less after Mushroom Henry... passed. But L’Manburg had figured it out. Niki’s bakery had done brisk business.

At least until the building had been blown up and the ashes poisoned with wither effect. That had made the business a little unprofitable.

“But tnt?” Grian said and Ren winced at how the other’s voice jumped up. “Tommy you said that war and blowing up other’s houses is normal but it’s not-”

“Hey.” Mumbo said, nudging Grian. “Take a few deep breaths. You’re starting to panic and I know this is a hotpoint for you. Maybe we should got to the nest for a while and let Xisuma handle the talk. He’s not going to understand yet.”

‘He’s not going to understand yet’? Oh, fuck them, Tommy understood perfectly well! He knew exactly why he was making his decision! The hermits were the ones who didn’t understand here!

“No, I’m fine. I just...” His wings ruffled and then dipped again, the beautiful organization of the feathers almost invisible with how puffed up they were. “Tommy, I went through this. I had an admin who was restrictive, terrible, and played games with our lives. He made our lives a living nightmare and it took so long to escape that.”

“Most of us did.” Ren broke in, shrugging as Tommy’s gaze snapped back to him. “My admin messed with my hybrid status and didn’t support me when others lashed out at me for something that was natural.”

“It is unfortunately far too common that those who should never be leading anyone will leap upon the power of an admin role.” Xisuma said. “All it technically takes is the strength to create a world and the status to invite others on to it. That’s why the admin council developed in the first place and why I’ve established Hermitcraft as a safe zone.”

“I- look, it doesn’t fucking matter, okay?” Tommy said, glaring. “I have it under control. Good for you for dealing with your own admins or whatever but I’m not- I can’t-. It’s just not going to work.”

He was the biggest of men but he had to admit that there was maybe, kinda, a difference between him and some who literally got the name Dreamslayer or who was one of the biggest redstoners in the multiverse or a big name admin. Sure, they got their problem solved but who the fuck would listen to him and the others?

He had tried to complain to an admin exactly once, on Hypixel, after someone had ripped him off in an auction trade. They had shrugged, refused to refund it, and even suspended him from the auctions as a way to ‘fix’ the problem. It was only later that he found out that the scammer was from the same guild that the admin was in tight with.

Maybe if Techno or Philza would- no. Neither of them would do that. They would have told him to suck it up and take care of it himself, times had changed since those golden days in the cabin.

When it came down to it, the little guys got screwed. And Wilbur had taught him how to deal with someone screwing you over. You picked up the blade and got even.

“What if.” Xisuma said. “I offered a compromise?”

Tommy eyed him uncertainly. “About what?” He said. He didn’t really see a way they could compromise on this. He wanted to leave. End of discussion. What came after that?

“You’re reluctant to inform outside authorities.” Xisuma said. “I can understand that. I have dealt with several servers without involving the admin council because when a player appeals to my help, I have the right to decide how far that aid shall go.”

“And?” Tommy said. Where was he going with this?

“If you are willing to wait a week or two for your injuries to heal and the worst of your manifestation to pass, I will help deal with your server.” Xisuma said. “You’ve implied that the issue is with your admin and it takes an admin to punish another admin. That way we’ll know that the problem is fully resolved and you don’t have to throw yourself headfirst into a war. In return, you’ll no longer impede your recovery and allow us to help you. No more fighting about touch or arguing against rest or items that you need.”

Tommy hesitates. Part of him, the one that always sounds suspiciously like Tubbo's voice, says he should take the offer. It was risky and suspicious, but he had more to lose from not taking it than taking it. Most of the hermits kind of seemed like pansies. But they didn't seem like the kind of pansies who would lie and betray him.

But as weird as he was, Grian didn't have the title of Dreamslayer for nothing. It had been one of the last hermit videos he had got to watch, back before Dream threw a fit and locked that mechanic and hack proofed it. He had asked why Dream had been sulking and Sapnap had thrown an arm over his shoulder, still laughing, and shown him Grian kicking Dream's ass in a bow fight.

(Maybe, just maybe, that is why he had been okay with taking Dream up on the bow duel offer. Because of how incredibly cool it had been watching the other absolutely own Dream.

He was never fucking telling Grian that though.)

It would be just like having Spirit's leather, but better. A real threat this time. Dream was always so concerned with his reputation and being strong so bringing in the guy who had killed him before, who he had hated so much? Now that would be so fucking pleasant to watch. Just a week.

But then again, the Blade had betrayed them. Had destroyed L'Manburg without even a single thought before swanning off to wherever anarchist piglin hybrids went. Would L'Manbur even last a week or two? He had already been gone at least a week-

He jerked out of his thoughts at the feeling of hands on his wings, releasing an annoyed hiss before he could snap it back, his face turning red. "I know it's scary." Zedaph said, smiling down at him. His hands carefully traced over Tommy's wings. "It's a hard decision to make, yeah?"

"I always know exactly what I'm going to do." Tommy snapped back. His wings drooped slightly as Zedaph pressed down on just the right spot. "Hey-"

"It's a trust thing." Zedaph said, and he scratched along an itchy spine that had been bothering Tommy for most of an hour. Tommy sighed, his claws uncurling from the pillow before they dug right back in again. "Trust me, I've seen it before. It's scary to ask someone else to help you! Even if you really should."

"I'm doing fine." Tommy mumbled, blinking hard to try and keep the haziness out of his eyes. He was going to tell Zedaph to move his hands away, right? But before he could, Zedaph's hand shifted again, the gentle touch carefully chasing away all the little itches and aches that had been bothering him. He tried to pull himself back together. "Is not a problem."

"We don't want to see you hurt." Zedaph said. He glanced over his shoulder, carefully tipping his head. A quiet thump, Tommy raised his head, nearly jumping in surprise when another set of hands took the other wing. "I- careful there, he doesn't have feathers like you- I can vouch for Xisuma when he says that we just want to... deal with whoever hurt you."

"You're so small." He continued, a note of wonder to his voice. "So small."

“M not small.” Tommy complained. It was getting harder to think, there was something lulling about what Zedaph and Grian were doing. Something familiar, that reminded him of the days when he stayed with Philza in their nest. But he just couldn’t think of what.. “I can bite you. I can bite Dream. I’ve got fucking fangs now, bitch.”

“You are small.” Zedaph said. “I thought the Ender dragon was small, but gods, I never quite thought about their hybrids being smaller! It’s kind of cool, but scary too.”

Tommy squinted at him. “I’m fucking taller than you?” He said. Zedaph was short, maybe even shorter than Tubbo. Why the fuck was he calling him small?

“Right now.” Zedaph said, like that wasn’t ominous as fuck. He hissed the next few words and Tommy jolted as he felt the sound hit straight on the back of his brain where he had shoved the weirder aspects of this whole thing. “Why won’t you let us help you?”

“Could betray me.” Tommy said, the words slipping out without a second thought. Some part of him was screaming at him for spilling his guts but he couldn’t quite hear it when another, evn louder, part was telling him to answer the big scary predator. “Wouldn’t be the first time. He fucking, he always fucking wins somehow. He gets in your head and twists it up and he made my brother go crazy and sometimes I think he’s made me go crazy and no one else seems to care.”

There was an odd cooing noise, a soft growl, and hushed words but he could quite focus on that, head gently pressing to the pillow. “Not quite yet.” Zedaph said, carefully shaking his shoulder. Tommy stared tiredly up at him. Were his eyes always pitch black? “Xisuma?”

“We could make a contract.” Xisuma’s voice broke in. “If you have it written down, you’ll know we can’t betray you. The terms of a contract are binding.”

Tommy considered this, the gears in his mind churning as fast as they could. Which was not very fast at all. Contracts were good, he was pretty sure of that. Even on 2b2t, some contracts could still be enforced. Granted, he was pretty sure he was thinking of slave contracts, but the thought counted, right?

“Why?” He mumbled. Why would Xisuma be willing to commit to a contract for him? Just to help him deal with Dream? He was just a nobody who stumbled on to the server by accident. There had to be more to it.

“You’re one of my players.” Xisuma said. “Your protection is now my responsibility. And part of that means eliminating those who have hurt you in the past. Once the traitorous admin is gone, you’ll be free to settle in and complete your healing.”

“In return for eliminating your admin and dealing with your old server, you’ll remain on Hermitcraft and no longer fight against our help. Deal?”

There was something wrong with that but his tired mind wasn’t quite sure what it was. Tommy let out a quiet warble, slumping further into the bed. Gods, this felt nice. Even better than a hug. “M’kay.” He mumbled. “Better write it down I guess.”

“That can be done.” Xisuma quietly promised.

“Was I this bad during my first preening?” Grian whispered above him. Tommy cooed as someone scratched around the base of one of his spines.

“You were worse I think.” Mm, Mumbo was still here? “Turned into a puddle of bird after a few seconds. At least he was still coherent enough to talk for a little while after starting.”

“The first preening always hits the hardest. It’s the instincts hitting like a hammer.” Zedaph said. Someone combed through Tommy’s hair. “After this, he’ll likely calm down a lot. Even a dragon needs soothing.”

“And you know that well.” A laugh.

Something was wrong here, but every time Tommy tried to grab it, it floated just out of his reach. Everything should be okay, right? He felt nice, Dream was finally going to get his comeuppance, and all he had to do was play good patient for a week or two.

So, why did his heart feel so heavy?

Chapter End Notes

I've been waiting so long to write the preening manipulation scene. Not that the hermits really think of it as manipulation, they just think it's easier to think and say what you really want when you don't have fear and stress and all the little annoyances that come with no preening. It's comforting! A family thing between flock! Totally a cool thing to do!

Also, did want to announce, LBAT will be going on a brief hiatus, returning the Monday after next. May 16th if you want an exact date. We're starting to get into the endgame now, and I just want to have the plot completely nailed down because I've got some big plans. I also want to take some time to dabble in a few of my other writing projects. It'll be worth the wait (I hope).

New Company

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings: References to trauma, manipulation

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy leaned forward against the railing, watching the world continue on below him.

He had to admit, the Omega Tree was one of his favorites. He'd never tell Iskall that, the cyborg was cool, but Tommy was not getting sucked into whatever contest had started between the hermits. Apparently they rarely had outside judges to show their bases. Competition had been fierce (but friendly strangely enough? No attempts at sabotage or rage quits. When he brought up using tnt or fire, Grian had laughed him off. They thought it was less fun that way?).

He refused to trade away his expert judging skills for free. Netherite or bust.

His Comm chimed in his hand but Tommy didn't check it, knowing he had already sent in his five minute check in text.

He had five minutes of blissful solitude before they came to check on him again.

It itches. A little. It had taken a bit of convincing for them to even give him these breaks, and in the end he only won because he had pointed out they probably still had base building to do and did they really want to drag him into a construction site or shuttle him across the server every day?

Grian had been the most reluctant but eventually Doc and Xisuma overruled him, pointing out that he did have a point about that.

The argument about letting him outside? Now that was a story all in itself. Tommy huffed, leaning against the railing harder, wings ruffling behind him. What trouble did they really think he could get into in five minutes?

He selectively forgot about the zombie incident. That didn't happen. What zombie? What injuries? Tommy had never gotten into trouble in his life.

He had just wanted a little time to himself, to think alone. Tubbo would have probably laughed and teased him that he never thought. But that was why he was out here, wasn't it? To think about them.

It had been... a week? Maybe a week and a half? He was pretty sure. It was hard when he had been inside for most of that, Zedaph had insisted that it was necessary he stay in the dark

as much as possible the first few days. Apparently, the End was an eternal void of fuck off and that meant his dumb brain wanted the endless night of that fuck off void.

That explained the massive migraine he had after going outside at least. Totally worth it.

He had spent that week mostly marathoning the videos on the Hermit channels, watching whatever caught his eye. If he wasn't marathoning videos, he was talking to whichever hermit was keeping him company or playing games.

(And wasn't that weird? So many people wanted to spend time with him now. Willingly. Yeah, people should be grateful when he blessed them with his presence but... it had been a while since he had been around so many people. And none of them cared when he got a little too annoying).

And weirdly enough, more hermits kept coming out of the woodwork to greet him. That was how he ended up at the Omega Tree. Iskall had come to say hello and then jokingly kidnapped him back to his own base.

He had nearly clawed Iskall's arm in a panic before Ren intervened and explained that he was okay with it, and Iskall was just pranking him by doing it this way. Fuckers. He would have appreciated a heads up at least before getting kidnapped. Tommy Innit ain't no damsel in distress.

The Omega Tree had been even more fucking terrifying outside of videos. He had at least managed to stop himself from shrieking this time. This time at least. Ranting didn't count.

Look it was one thing to watch someone carefully placing leaf blocks for five minutes. It was another thing entirely to connect that to the massive fucking tree itself, apparently molded out of spite and whatever willpower cyborgs had.

Iskall had just laughed and said he should see Scar build a tree sometime. "At least he understands a bit though." Tommy said, tapping on the railing. A soft chirp made him look up, smiling when he saw the red bird on the railing. "Ain't that right, Henry?"

Prime, he had been so happy to be reunited with his buddy. Henry had been a bit pissy he couldn't ride on his shoulders anymore, apparently it was bad for the still developing muscles, but had gracefully agreed it was unnecessary after a handful of watermelon seeds.

Truly, a bird after his own heart, scamming all the fools left and right. He was pretty sure the parrot had gained weight from constantly scamming Grian.

They had a working system now. Tommy got to eat the golden apple and Henry got the seeds and core that was left over. Truly, parrots were one of man's best friend. Tubbo would have been so jealous if he was here-

Tommy sighed, flopping forward to rest his head against the warm wooden railing, closing his eyes with a huff. He heard Henry chirp but didn't look up. "'M fine, Henry." He said.

He just didn't know why he couldn't stop thinking and worrying about everyone. Big man like him should be beyond this, and yet the others lived in his thoughts almost constantly. Guilt swooping in and tainting even the coolest stuff.

He still hadn't received any messages. After the first day, he had finally decided to bite the arrow and send his own to a handful of private chats. Tubbo. Big Q. Philza. Fuck, he even messaged Technoblade. The pig would never pass up a chance to mock him for being dumb.

Absolutely nothing. Complete radio silence. It was like the chats weren't even active. He didn't even see a read notice. And as each day passed, he became more and more sure he wasn't going to get a reply. Every chime was always one of the hermits messaging him or the world chat going into a tizzy.

He had stopped sending messages... two days ago? Yeah that fit, he was pretty sure it had been at least two days. If they hadn't messaged him yet, they were probably too busy to text.

Hopefully, it wasn't Dream being a massive green bitch. He had no idea what he would do if he came back to yet another overly cheery fake ghost. Maul Dream, yeah, that was a given. Anything else? Not a fucking clue.

Just not another fucking ghost. Not another one.

He found himself thinking about people he hadn't thought about much at all since getting exiled. Like Callahan, wherever the reindeer dude had disappeared to before the first war. Jack, what the fuck was Jack doing? He had been too busy to talk to the other after L'Manburg came to be.

It annoyed him as much as it stung. They shouldn't live in his thoughts like this, not if he didn't live in theirs. He shouldn't be sitting here, wondering how they were when they didn't have the decency to even read his messages.

And yet, they stayed. With every new build, he caught himself turning to the side, about to ask Tubbo what he thought about the fucking ludicrous build. Or waiting for Wilbur to cut in with his melodramatic but pretty speeches, all the world a dance floor or something like that.

Sometimes in the darker nights, he wondered if Technoblade would have burned this place down too, with their joking governments and laws all over the place.

The hermits did their best to deal with it, he knew. Especially because he didn't really want to talk about it. It was easier not to think with them around, when he could let him get swept up in Grian or Mumbo's jokes or Scar's stories or Stress's descriptions of her potion factories.

"Pretty un Pog." He mumbled into the railing. He had negotiated this break because he thought he wanted to get away but now he kind of wanted them back. And that made him feel worse until it just fed in on itself.

All with the delightful background track of whispers that sounded suspiciously like Dream.

But he wasn't going to break first. He wouldn't. It had taken him so long to negotiate these breaks, only thirty minutes long, with five minute check ins. Unable to leave the spot they left him in. After all that effort, to roll over and ask they never leave him alone again was quitter talk and he wasn't a quitter.

"Do you think Xisuma has found the server yet?" He mumbled, not expecting an answer. Grian said he could work on teaching Henry how to speak but it was going to take a while even if Henry was the most pogchamp bird ever.

"Probably not."

Tommy let out a sharp shriek, toppling backward. He scrambled back blindly, eyes flying open.

They did not sound familiar. And yet-

It was Xisuma's voice somehow. Crackly and staticky like it was being fed through one of those vintage voice changers. It had that recognizable tone, the mechanical edge, and yet at the same same time it was completely unrecognizable.

And he only grew more confused when he saw who was in front of him. It looked like Xisuma had gotten a sudden taste for red, changing over the bee accents in his suit for a red as dark as dried blood. They leaned against the railing, tilting their helmet in a way that seemed mocking instead of concerned.

Tommy scowled. "Did you really put all that together to prank me?" He said, standing up and dusting himself off. How was this funny in any way? "So not pogchamp, I mean really? I could scare people better than that?"

"A prank, huh?" The Xisuma lookalike mused to themselves. "Does this seem like a prank to you?"

Tommy wheezed as the air filled with the choking smell of ozone, so thick he could almost swear there was lightning dancing around his throat. With a pop like the crack of lightning striking down, the guy disappeared again. Tommy rubbed his throat, careful not to cut himself with his claws.

"What the fuck?" He said, glancing around. That didn't seem like any method of teleportation he knew of. Hacking usually need a Comm out to enter commands and admins could teleport completely silently. An Enderman hybrid? No, it wasn't quite as... warbly was a good way to describe the sound of an Ender teleportation. Ranbitch had warbled a lot. "Where the fuck did he go?"

Henry let out a squawk of fear, fleeing into the upper branches of the tree. Tommy watched him go with relief, happy to see Henry was out of danger. Especially when he had no clue where the fuck that guy was-

"Behind you."

Tommy spun around with a gasp, scrambling back before settling into a familiar stance. His iron ax fell into his hands with a flash of light, a comforting weight as he raised it high.

The lookalike raised his hands. “Why the sudden threat?” He asked. “I thought we were just talking.”

“You fucking teleported behind me.” Tommy said, his words choked and hissed. How the fuck did he do that? There wasn’t even the sound of a stasis chamber or the crackle of the initial teleport.

“You asked a question, I was just showing you how wrong you were.” The lookalike said. So, there were two fuckers out there who could make a mask look condescending.

But what fucking question? Tommy racked his brains. Wait. “How can you not be Xisuma?” He said. You look exactly like him.”

And not in the oh, must be twins way. Not in the joking similarities Wilbur used to declare he and Techno were twins. The way they stood, the tilt of the mask, even the way they shifted and exhaled while waiting for him to speak. It was eerie, the similarities between the two. It was the vibes, he decided. Something about the vibes. Totally not him just throwing out a description because he had no fucking clue.

“Your vibe check is fucking rancid though.” Tommy said, shifting on his feet. His normal stance felt kind of weird now with the wings and the tail shifting his balance. “Like, moldy rancid, someone forgot to clean and enchant their food chest rancid.”

“I sure hope so.” The lookalike said. Was the fucker puffing out their chest and preening? The fuck? “It takes talent to be this way.”

“Talent at being a bitch.”

“I’m surprised Xisuma hasn’t broken you off that habit.” The imposter said. Tommy bristled, tail flicking at the air like it could cut if it moved fast enough.

“He can’t stop me from doing anything. He’s not the boss of me.” He said savagely before adding. “Bitch.”

The swearing was the one thing he refused to let go and the hermits could pry it out of his cold dead hands. No matter how much they chided or scolded him, he refused to stop. Maybe it was against the server rules but it wasn’t against his rules so nyeh.

“I don’t fucking care.” The imposter said. Tommy twitched, not expecting to actually hear another person swear. “Swear all you fucking like. You’re probably going to need it.”

Well, if that wasn’t ominous as hearing a ghost cry when you were on a one block wide bridge.

“I’m going to ask one more time.” Tommy asked, raising the axe. He’d give this guy one more chance before going full ax murderer on him. For Iskall, who’d probably be annoyed at cleaning up blood out of the wood. “Who the fuck are you.”

“Xisuma. Well, you can call me Evil X. A fitting enough name.” Well, upgrade that sense of ominous tidings to seeing a piglin brute on the other side of the door. Tommy stiffened, glancing back to his Comm again. He could totally fucking take this guy but. Someone calling themselves evil didn’t exactly give him any better vibes. “There’s been an ownership dispute over that first name after all.”

Why the fuck had Xisuma not told him he had a creepy monster twin? That seemed like something to cover in orientation. ‘Here are the rules, here’s your Comm, oh yeah, if you see a guy named Evil X, you have full rights to murder’.

Tommy always had full rights to murder but still. A warning would have been hell a nice.

It was... kind of weird they hadn’t warned him. Grian had been so fussy about him leaving the bedroom they started calling the nest. Iskall demanded five minute updates and Xisuma had even formed a contract mandating bed rest.

Why leave this little fact out?

“You’re off your fucking rocket.” Tommy said, risking a glance back. His Comm still sat on the railing innocently, it’s soft chime ceaselessly chipping away at the silence. How much longer would he have before his five minutes were up? It couldn’t be more than two or three left. “Get the fuck out before I kill you.”

“I don’t think you’re going to want to do that.” Evil X or whatever drawled. “In fact, I think you’re going to want to pick up that Comm of yours and send your pesky hermits a message saying that you’re alright and just want a bit more time to yourself. Your time is only halfway up after all, you have plenty of extensions left to talk to me.”

Tommy barked a laugh, nearly dropping his ax from the pain that flared along his side with the force of it. “You gotta be fucking kidding me.” He said. “Do you actually think I’m that fucking dumb?”

“You might be.” Evil X said. He paced back and forth by the wall, his boots clomping fully across the wooden planks.

“You take that back.” Tommy hissed, wings flaring out. “I’ll fucking kill you. I will. I got fucking claws and stuff.”

Very few people got to call him dumb and this guy definitely wasn’t one of them.

His heart thudded fast against his ribs. Lunge, his brain told him. This guy was fucking dangerous. That teleportation was definitely inhuman and his resemblance to Xisuma meant he could be pretty powerful. Combine that with a name that literally said evil and his rancid vibes and Tommy didn’t need Tubbo to tell him this was a bad guy.

But his heart held him back. The same fear that had made him hesitate before trying his first water bucket save, the same fear he had when he slipped under the waves. Dangerous, it whispered, too dangerous for us to take. Hide. Run. Call for help. It made him hesitate.

“We could summarize.” Evil X said, either not noticing or acknowledging Tommy’s indecision. “You chose to stay rather than to leave when you first woke up. You chose to believe them when they said you wouldn’t survive. You allowed them access to your code, let them convince you you had to manifest, and now you’re still staying here.”

Tommy’s breath froze in his lungs. His tail fell still for the first time since it grew in.

“What?” He whispered. What was he-

“Come on, did you really think that cute little video of Impulse was just him having a case of first day nerves, right? You’re not the only one they’ve brought in this way.” Evil X said. He stepped forward but Tommy couldn’t bring himself to step back. “Send the message and I’ll tell you everything.”

“What makes you think I’ll believe you.” Tommy said. “Your name even starts with Evil. You’ve been a rude bitch since you got here. Why the fuck should I believe you and tell them everything is okay?”

“What makes you think you should believe them?”

And, the worst part was that he was considering it. And he shouldn’t and it made him feel sick that he did.

The hermits had been nothing but kind to him. A little weirdchamp at times, but they had given him so much without apparently expecting anything in return. Food, shelter, potions, even undoing his code lock. Healing the health lock bit by bit.

But Evil X’s warning hit on his more... hidden concerns. The way the Hermits had looked when he suggested leaving. The darkness in their eyes. All those terrible little seeds of confusion and suspicion that he had shoved deep down and refused to acknowledge.

He really truly wanted to believe the hermits were looking out for him. That they didn’t want to hurt him. That there was real love and care there.

But how many times had he thought that before?

Wilbur, Techno, Philza, Tubbo, Dream.... The list went on and on.

”I mean it.” He had whispered to Tubbo, one sunny day where the dust hid the blood on the ground and he could pretend he wasn’t another soldier left in the ruins of a war nobody won. *”I’ve got my fucking guard up. No one is ever going to slip by me again.”*

He had sworn to Tubbo that he was telling the truth that day. No more spies, no more lies, no more stupid older brother figures going crazy. This time, it would be us against the world.

That lasted a few weeks.

This promise he wanted to last a whole lot longer. It had dragged him through vice presidency, exile, and now, he was here. Being told everything he knew was a lie.

Flock wouldn't lie to you, the instincts he knew came from the dragon whispered. Flock loves you. Protects you. This is not flock. He needed to trust them like they trusted him.

Yeah, Tommy thought, glaring at the imposter. Evil X didn't flinch, watching him evenly. Waiting for his reply. His hand tightened on the ax.

One beat.

He turned around, picking up the Comm. A message was already waiting for him.

Iskall85: How's everything going? Do you need food? Potions? I'm almost down with this build segment, maybe we can go see Joe's wolf sanctuary together.

He waited on the edge of the cliff, holding a water bucket in his hands. He could feel the salt water lapping at his skin, drawing him down. The crackle of tnt as his once brother lit up the best home he had ever known.

Tommy Kraken Danger Innit wasn't afraid of anyone.

And he didn't need anyone.

Tommyinnit: I'm finnnneeee, finish yuor boring leaf thing, Henry is being too pog, overruled

After all, Philza and Techno were once flock too.

Chapter End Notes

I ended up cutting this in half because it was getting way too long. Evil X absolutely stole the show. (Definitely not because it also fed my desire for cliffhangers, I'd never do that to you guys).

The frog has finally noticed the water is boiling.

The Water is Boiling

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings: emotional manipulation, mild disassociation, hermits have videos from when Tommy was sick

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“There we go. So much easier to talk when we don’t risk being interrupted.” Evil X said, folding his arms. Tommy rolled his eyes.

“I don’t want to talk to you for long.” He snapped, already regretting what he had done. Just a little bit. Too late to go back now though, he couldn’t exactly send a ‘whoops, actually, there’s this unpog fucker on my balcony, ruining the vibes’. Not that he would tell Evil X that. “What do you mean by saying I can’t trust them?”

“Rushing so quickly? Don’t you at least want to have a little bit of a conversation.” Evil X said. “It feels like you just want me for what I know.”

“I do.” Tommy said, rolling his eyes again. Could eyes fall out if you rolled them too much? Because it definitely felt like a fucking risk here while talking to this guy. He called it, the guy was absolutely a smug prick like Dream.

“Prickly, prickly.” Evil X said with a sigh. “I suppose we can skip ahead a bit. But what questions do you think you should be asking?”

Tommy scoffed, resting the ax on his shoulder. “What do you mean what questions I should be asking? You just said you know all the stuff, yeah?” Tommy said. Was this some kind of elaborate prank or some shit? He was starting to suspect it at this point.

“I’m not making it that easy.” Evil X said, spreading his arms. “You remember I am called ‘Evil’ X, yes? I have to earn that first part somehow. I’ll tell you but only if you ask the right questions.”

There was some kind of message buried in that. Tubbo probably could have picked it out, he was able to see all that kind of stuff (just not Dream’s). But Tommy was tired and stressed, and there was a little voice getting gradually louder in the back of his head that wanted to go back to his nice warm nest with Iskall and Bird Henry and maybe see if some of the other hermits wanted to visit. Mumbo still hadn’t finished the story of Grumbot’s creation yet.

If the first answer was bullshit, he’d call Iskall, he decided. But he just had to ask one first. At least one. Tommy hesitated before latching on to one of the events he heard him say.

“What did you mean by ‘you chose to believe them when they said you wouldn’t survive’”

“What else? The night you spent out on your own of course.” Evil X said with a shrug. For a moment, the ozone smell in the air increased before fading away. “You said you could have survived and believed them when they said you couldn’t.”

“I could have.” Tommy insisted. “If it wasn’t for the stupid mob rule.”

“What stupid mob rule?” Evil X asked, tilting his head.

“The hardcore ones! The stupid ones with extra spawns and strength and-“

And things he never remembered from Philza’s stories. Waves after waves of mobs who all targeted him exactly, all pretty strong. Until he was forced back and had to concede to a brief tactical retreat. Tommy looked up, seeing Evil X’s eyes were still on him.

“Did they trick me?” He snarled. Evil X watched him silently and it took all he had to ask his question with words instead of the sharp end of his ax. “Did they change the mob rules so I’d fail?”

Part of him, the suspiciously hissy part, said no. Admins couldn’t change rules Willy nilly like that. Dream had always complained about it being a process and a long one at that, even if the changes always strangely benefited him especially. The thought of an admin like Xisuma making such a huge change just to trick him was crazy. Insane really.

“That was the largest part of it, yes. A bit of a tweak to the mob rules, a rather neat use of the mechanics that accompanies phantoms just being extrapolated over more mobs to create a target in a small area, and well, there you have it.” Evil X said. They chuckled at the look of devastation that flickered over Tommy’s face before disappearing again. “Did you really think that Ren just conveniently stumbled over you?”

“Oh man, I hope I wasn’t too late.”

That single blurry line. One of the few things he could remember from that night before passing out. Subconsciously, Tommy pressed a hand to his stomach, feeling the phantom flicker of pain even where potions had already left him as good as new.

He had dismissed it because it really could have meant anything. Maybe Ren had heard the mobs and run to come help him.

Or maybe he had known where Tommy was going to be.

“He said he had been hiking back from a mining trip.” Tommy mumbled, half to himself. A stroke of luck. But it rang hollow to him, had been a bit strange ever since he had woken.

“Hiking back and not using an elytra? Strange choice.” Evil X countered. Cutting straight to the heart of the matter.

The only times the hermits regularly walked around were when they were doing something on the ground, walking around their base, or... looking for something. Tommy had watched Grian fly ten feet just because he didn’t feel like walking.

Why would Ren have been hiking at night?

“If it makes you feel worse, they likely didn’t adjust it too much. You are health locked after all.” Evil X said. Tommy flipped him off.

He had six hearts now and he was pretty fucking proud of that.

“I’m gonna fucking kill them.” Tommy grumbled. He had trusted them, had respected Ren for saving him. Stroke of luck. Evil X could have been lying but with the other’s words, it confirmed a suspicion that had been lying buried in his heart for a long time. “What’s fucking next? They’re the ones who made me sick when I got here?”

Evil X’s silence was telling.

“Oh motherfuck-“

“It likely wasn’t them specifically.” Evil X corrected, shrugging under Tommy’s glare. “You were dosed with weakness potions when you first arrived. It’s unsurprising that between that, the glitch, and the sudden arrival, you got sick. Players, honestly, you have the immune system of a bee on one hit point.”

“I have the immune system of a god. I have never been sick in my life.” Tommy said, folding his arms. “Some people get sick, but I, I do not. I just tell myself to get good and then I’m not sick anymore. I suppose you wouldn’t know, not having the immune system of a god, and I pity your poor coding.”

“That’s a lie.” Evil X said, the first time he sounded confused in their entire conversation. “I witnessed it. Xisuma locked me in the void for days because of it.”

“Brothers, am I right?” Tommy said, nodding. Evil X nodded right along. Massive bitches, brothers were. The absolute worst honestly. “But still. Fuck off, prove me wrong.”

“They have video.” Evil X said.

“They fucking took video?” Tommy said. He swiped his Comm up again, quickly flipping to the video archives. Most of the recent stuff focused on new builds or games. Tommy was in a few, usually as a bystander, a thought that had made his chest feel warm at being included. At that little mark that would exist long after he left the server.

Now he just felt icy cold.

It was one thing to be a bystander or in one of the videos. It was another to know that they had videos of him when he was vulnerable.

But there wasn’t anything there. “Do you think they would post it there as you’re still recovering?” Evil X said with a scoff. “No, they’d keep it. Excuse it as not wanting to stress your fragile condition and show off the videos later when you’re stronger. You’ll find videos if you go through any of their comms.”

Tommy glared down at his Comm, grip so tight that his knuckles were white. His tail lashed behind him. "That's a bit fucking creepy." He said, but it was just a little, just maybe, a bit of a weak protest.

What if there was an excuse, that little voice whispered. What if this is how normal servers react to sickness? How can you trust him?

"Look for yourself." Evil X said. "I'm not going to handhold you through this."

Tommy glared at him. "The manifestation excuse wasn't real either, I'm guessing." His tone was as bitter as wither rose tea.

"Yes and no. You did need to manifest at some point but right then? Not really." Evil X said with a shrug. "But it was a conveniently placed excuse to keep you in the server while they dealt with your old one."

"What do you mean dealt with my old one?" Tommy said with a frown. "They didn't know anything about it."

Maybe he had let bits and pieces slip like the cool mysterious guy he was but it wasn't till they struck their bargain that Xisuma started searching for it.

Evil X tilted his head to the side. "Did you know? They--"

"Tommy!"

Tommy jumped nearly a fit in the air, scrambling back from the balcony on pure instinct alone. Iskall's voice came from the door. Terrifyingly close to it in fact.

Why was he here? Did he miss the check in? He thought he had kept a good eye on the time! Fuck, he needed his last question answer, what was he missing?

"What do you want?" He yelled, the ax disappearing back into his inventory with a flash. Evil X moved and with a flash of frustration, Tommy saw it was towards the balcony, hands coming up to grab the railing. And stupidly, he grabbed the others arms.

It took everything he had to turn the scream into a strangled hiss, hand jolting back. Where Xisuma had been a bit chilly, Evil X was absolutely freezing. So cold that it felt like touching an ice block on steroids, the ones dug out underneath layers and layers of snow. And the fucker absolutely chuckled, watching as Tommy frantically waved his hand and tried to rub feeling back into it. The skin where he had touched Evil x was bone white like he had been sticking them into the snow for a while.

"Tommy? Are you okay in there?" The door rattled. Tommy froze, hoping he suddenly manifested telepathy so Evil X would hear his command not to fucking leave.

"I'm fine! Just banged my wing into a chair while getting up! You know how it is, you go one way and the wings go another. Completely fine." He said, scrambling for an excuse.

It wasn't like it would be the first time he had banged his wings or tail into something. Sometimes it felt like they had a mind of their own.

"Really? I'll come in and take a look. I don't want you hurting yourself." Tommy threw himself forwards, leaning against the door.

"But this is supposed to be my time!" He said, reddening a bit at the whiny edge to his voice. Something had to be sacrificed for the cause, he supposed. Tommy was a cool guy, he could let his dignity take a few smacks.

"Tommy, that deal doesn't apply if you get hurt." Iskall warned. Tommy yelped a little as his shoulder jolted when Iskall pushed against the door harder. Evil X was still watching, leaning against the railing with a smug air. "Tommy, I know your privacy is important to you but I'm worried about you. Hiding yourself away is not safe behavior and now you're hurt."

"I'm fine!" Tommy insisted. "Nothing to see here!"

"Fine doesn't have Henry nearly knocking me off my scaffolding and fluttering around in a panic." Iskall said sternly. Oh that absolute traitor. Bird Henry betrayed him? This was truly a low day.

No, he mustn't think like that. Bird Henry was a good boy. He probably thought Tommy was in danger and nobly tried to get help like the amazing bird he was. It was just kind of unfortunate that Tommy really didn't need that kind of help right now.

"Fuck." Tommy swore. "Seriously, I'm fine! He's just overreacting a bit! Chill the fuck out!"

"Tommy if you don't open this door, I'll take the other route and you'll be losing the alone time privileges because you've proven you're not safely handling them." Iskall said. "You have five seconds. One..."

Tommy winced glancing back at Evil X. Was this really worth it? To lose the only alone time he had managed to weasel out? He didn't always like being alone but it had felt nice, sometimes, to sit and think for a bit. Evil X stared back, refusing to help his decision at all. Fucker.

"Two..."

But he could get a little bit more of the truth. And a big part of it.

"Three..."

Xisuma had told him that finding his server was going to take a while. He had bugged him for updates daily and the admin had told him that he hadn't found anything yet.

"Four..."

Too well hidden, he said. Dream's server was private and locked down and even with the information they had, no one knew anything about the server other than Tommy's account

and it was difficult to trace a server with a brief description and a few people who had lived there, most if any of which hadn't interacted outside the server in years.

"Five. Tommy, I'm sorry you're making me do this."

Tommy gritted his teeth, hearing the footsteps thump away. The truth was more important right now. He had to know what they were lying about. And he had maybe a minute or two before Iskall crossed to the next exit and flew around.

"I think that's my time to leave." Evil X said. Tommy's head snapped back, eyes wide. "I didn't enjoy talking to you. Have a terrible day."

"Fuck, wait!" He said, throwing himself across the balcony. Hesitating just before he hit the guy, remembering the feel of that icy chill. What were you saying? About my server!"

"Oh that?" Evil X said, tilting his head. There was the snapping pop of a firework nearby, time was running out. "You didn't know?"

"Didn't know what?" Tommy said.

"They found your server. They know people on it actually. I thought Iskall especially would have told you." Evil X said. There was a flicker of disappointment in his voice as Tommy froze instead of offering a good reaction.

With the same snapping pop and flash, Evil X disappeared again. But Tommy was still frozen, staring at where they had disappeared.

They... knew?

They had known the entire time? The conversations where Xisuma comforted him, where Grian listened to him panic and held him and said it would be okay, they'd find his home soon, that was all a lie?

Why didn't anyone tell him? Why pretend like they didn't know?

Evil X may have answered some of his questions but he left him with one last burning one.

"Tommy!" It took real effort to look up as Iskall glided over the railing, hitting the balcony with a textbook perfect landing. They crossed the balcony in a handful of steps, reaching out to grab him. "Are you okay? What happened? Why weren't you letting me through?"

"Nothing." Tommy mumbled. He cleared his throat. "Nothing happened. You're being super clingy right now."

He glanced around the balcony, relieved to see that Evil X had really disappeared this time. There wasn't even any evidence the other was there. If it was for the cold chill lingering in his hand, he could almost believe that he had made up the encounter.

He squeezed that hand, digging his finger into the skin that still felt like he had grabbed ice. It wasn't a hallucination. Not like what had happened before. Hallucinations didn't leave ice

burns behind.

It wasn't.

"You can't expect me to believe that." Iskall said. He pressed a hand to Tommy's shoulder. "C'mon what happened? Why won't you talk to me? Did you have another panic attack?"

"I- nothing happened." Tommy said, going a bit red. He hated when they threw his panic attacks in his face. He had been working on them but apparently repressing them down into a tight ball and tossing it in a dark corner of his mind wasn't healthy.

A soft chime. Tommy glanced down, seeing Iskall's Comm hooked on their belt. The hermit kept it there when he was building, said it freed up his inventory space.

You'll find videos if you went through any of their comms.

Tommy's eyes flickered down momentarily, seeing his own Comm by his feet where it had fallen in his desperation to stop Evil X from leaving. He steeled his heart. Comms could be repaired. But right now, he needed a good excuse.

A slight tiny nudge and it was skidding over the edge of the balcony. Iskall paused, clearly hearing the noise, but Tommy was already moving again.

He slumped his shoulders, easy to do when Iskall was running his hands over his wings like that. It always sent a little shiver down his spine that made him relax, even if it made him sick to his stomach now. Tommy rocked a bit on his feet, remembering how Tubbo always did that when he got anxious.

Bingo. Iskall's eyes were back on him again.

"I- I won't get in trouble, right? They won't be mad? You won't be mad." Tommy said, scrambling a bit for words.

"Never, sapling. We could never get mad at you." Iskall said, rubbing a hand through his hair. "What has you so out of sorts that you locked me out? You know you need to tell us everything."

Pity that feeling wasn't vice versa, Tommy thought. C'mon, act like Tubbo would, he reminded himself. You can tell him how you pulled off a super smart plan. "I knocked my Comm off the balcony." He said, cringing a bit. It was to get away from Iskall's hands but the other didn't know that. "And it fell and I thought it broke and I was trying to get it so I could fix it but then you came before I figured out how to get down and Henry was gone because he got scared by the noise and- and I just kinda panicked."

The words came out a bit of a garbled mess but he was pretty sure that added to the lie? He couldn't remember the times he threw Wilbur under the bus for breaking something but he was pretty sure his panic was helping. Or hurting. Fuck!

"Xisuma won't be mad that you broke your Comm." Iskall said softly. "Why would you think that? He told you that he's happy to help you out with anything and that includes fixing your

Comm if you need it.”

“I know.” Tommy mumbled. “Just didn’t want to get into trouble.”

“Never.” Iskall said firmly. “Here’s what we can do. We can go down and look for your Comm. I’ll tell Xisuma that it’s broken and then we can go inside and I’ll show you the redstone I’ve been planning. I’ll call Grian and Stress in the morning so you can talk to them.”

“About part of that.” Tommy said, fidgeting slightly. Come on, don’t blow it now. The entire operation rested on him delivering this perfectly. “Can I tell him?”

Iskall frowned. “You want to talk to Xisuma?” He said. Not angry, just curious, but Tommy’s heart juddered anyway. There’s no porcelain mask. He’s not talking to Dream.

But it feels like he is. It feels like the moment before Dream found his secret stash. When everything good about exile went up in a cloud of smoke.

“If you’re right about this thing.” He hears himself say. “I was some fucking proof, yeah? I’m not gonna let you tell him about it and then he hides he’s mad at me.”

It’s a lie, and a bad one. He can already hear Wilbur laughing at him. But Iskall just shakes his head. “Of course you can talk to him. He’s always happy to talk to you.” He said, pulling out his Comm. A couple taps, and Iskall was passing over his Comm.

It felt like it weighed a thousand pounds.

“Ready to go now, big man. Let’s see if my Comm made a crater.” He said. Iskall laughed but the sound didn’t bring that same warm feeling into his chest.

Tommy followed after the other mechanically, ducking through the now opened door. Bird Henry was still missing, probably back in the little aviary Iskall had made for him. Which sucked because Tommy really really wanted him right now.

Focus on the Comm, he reminded himself. Then Henry.

He could do so many pranks with this. But nothing felt right right now. He wasn’t sure if it would ever feel right again. Walking felt like going through the motions, like it wasn’t his body and someone else was piloting it.

A few taps. Xisuma’s channel had already been opened and thank prime because this felt like way too much effort already. He wanted to punch something. Curl up in a hall and sleep. Message done. Send the message.

Iskall85: This is Tommy

Iskall85: don’t be mad

Iskall85: I broke my Comm maybe

He glanced up. Iskall hadn’t looked back at him yet. Quickly, he moved over to the videos section. Surely, Evil X was lying about this. They couldn’t have been hiding these from him.

He clicked over to personal videos, his heart thudding against his ribs.

He tried to pretend it was from the thudding of their boots down the stairs but he knew it was a lie.

The first video was him, clearly asleep, head in someone's lap. His face red from fever. A few videos down was him, awake this time but his pupils were blown wide. Completely out of it. There was a small clattering sound as his tail swatted a nearby wall.

"Everything alright." Iskall said, pausing and looking back. Tommy nodded jerkily.

"I sent it. Just waiting for him to respond." He said. The lie felt stubborn, dropping from his mouth like sludge. Believe it, please believe it.

There was a soft chime, his savior in the moment. Tommy clicked back over to the messages section, seeing Xisuma's name lit up.

Something caught his eye before he could send it. Tucked at the very bottom of the screen was a channel conversation, dated to as recently as a few days ago.

ItsFundy: Hey, so-

I thought Iskall especially would have told you.

Huh. So he could feel more horrified. He always knew he could feel more than the average man. Tommy felt so angry, he had no words for it, his knuckles white against the Comm.

His mouth tasted like blood.

The part about Fundy being able to contact the hermits wasn't quite a surprise. Fundy had always been fantastic at manipulating code, Wilbur had bragged about the other creating data packs for servers all the time. It didn't come as a surprise really that the other had found a way around Dream's ban on outside comms.

He'd definitely yell at the fox hybrid for not passing that nifty trick along but still. Focus.

They knew Fundy. And if they knew Fundy, they had to know what server Fundy lived on. Fundy was a terrible gossip, he absolutely would have mentioned it. Fuck, he was pretty sure he mentioned Fundy in his mini rant- information session after he woke up and they discussed the agreement.

Evil X had been right. He wanted to feel angry. But he just felt cold.

He had thought this place could be home.

What was he supposed to do?

This was quite the chapter! I've been excited about this reveal for a long time.

Start of Something New

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Yeah, that’s definitely broken.” Iskall said, picking up his Comm from the ground. Tommy flinched, barely holding back from grabbing it back. “I think that fall was just a bit too much for it.”

“Aw, you gotta be fucking kidding me.” Tommy said. He knew Iskall was right as soon as he saw the Comm. Most player communicators were built tough, meant to withstand the rough treatment they could be put through during daily life.

One of the weird bits of unknown about the universe. Every player had them and yet no one knew where they had come from. People had figured out how to upgrade and fix them but not how to create one. They followed players through every respawning and every server change. Tommy had dropped his in lava, the ocean, and once threw it at Tubbo without so much of a crack.

But other times, they have a durability of an iron golem on half a heart facing a raid. Cracks covered the screen, the metal dented on one side.

He gritted his teeth, trying to cling to Tubbo’s advice about being quiet (even if it felt like he was listening to someone else instead). It probably wouldn’t have broken if it had been upgraded again. But the hermits had been dodgy about upgrading it, because of the glitch.

(And secretly, he had been a bit reluctant too. Upgrading would mean it would be gone for at least a few days. A few days where he could get a message from his friends. And even with poisonous lime whispering in his ears, Tommy clung to the possibility).

Now that felt like a pathetic lie. And all he wanted was to scream in Iskall’s face.

“Fuck.” He said, the words choking in his throat. “Fuck, is that bad luck.”

“Hey, it’s not that bad.” Iskall said with a frown. It took everything Tommy had to restrain from going for his throat when a heavy hand settled on his shoulder. “Xisuma can speed up the repair process so you won’t be out for too long.”

“Still too fucking long.” Tommy said, forcing his glare down at the ground.

He had been hoping it wouldn’t break from the fall. How the fuck was he supposed to contact the Dream SMP now?

He knew at the very least Fundy was active and responding to messages. So surely, if he messaged him with everything, he might respond now.

(Like he responded to his messages before?)

But now he was down a Comm for who knows how long. Possibly too long if that Evil X fucker sold him out. Having to play along to this stupid happy family scenario and pretend like he didn't know their words were lies. That they were probably laughing behind his back at how much of an idiot he had been.

"We can just hang out while we wait." Iskall said with a casual shrug. "Etho and I could give you a tour of his base, I know you like looking at the elaborate redstone and Etho is one of the best there is. It's a bit of a walk but it shouldn't be too bad."

"But I don't want to wait." Tommy said, his glaring growing. Purple flecks of light seemed to flicker in front of his eyes. "I want my fucking Comm."

"I can see what we can do." Iskall said softly. Tommy hissed, angry at himself for stooping that low, to the more animalistic sounds of anger, but it was the only thing that properly labeled how fucking angry he was.

Iskall's hand felt heavy. Tommy shook it off, the angry hiss rattling through his chest not quite disguising how he was breathing fast, his heart thudding hard against his ribs.

If they knew he knew, would the limited goodwill he had run out? Would they hurt him? Hit him?

They had promised not to touch him but he wasn't sure if he could trust that anymore. Not with how they had lied and manipulated and tricked him. Even drugged him.

Maybe before he wouldn't have cared about the drugging part but Tubbo- Tubbo had said that drugging people wasn't a sign of love. And he still wasn't sure how true that was but the doubt lingered now. It would be so so easy for Iskall to get angry.

Iskall paused with a sigh. "And we were making such good progress." He said. And he couldn't help how that made his heart sink a bit with guilt but Tommy just redoubled his glare, refusing to acknowledge it.

But whatever Iskall was looking for, he didn't find the right answer. "False will be here soon." He said quietly. "We should take a rest until then. Once she gets here, she can help you out with the instincts thing."

"I'm tired of resting." Tommy snapped. He kept trying to hide away his anger but he wasn't Tubbo. He didn't want to hide how angry he was. They fucking deserved his anger. "I'm not a fucking kid, I don't need a nap."

"Tommy." Iskall said, folding his arms. Tommy folded his right back. "You know what Grian and Zedaph said, they both agreed that regular trips to the nest would be best for keeping you healthy."

"Fuck that. I'm tired of the fucking nest." He hissed. Why was that always their answer? "Stop fucking putting me to bed whenever I get grumpy."

“You say that like it doesn’t always put you in a better mood.” Iskall said. He sighed at seeing Tommy’s glare, still not faltering. “You like the nest, I know you do. I loan you my Comm, we’ll watch videos together and False will be there. You like False.”

“I don’t want to go to the nest.” Tommy hissed. “I want the rest of my alone time.”

“You know I can’t do that. You’re clearly unhappy and quiet time in the nest will do you good.” Iskall answered. Tommy bristled.

“What the fuck are you going to do about it?” He replied. Hurt him? Put his stuff in a hole? He had seen it all. If Dream couldn’t break him, Iskall definitely wouldn’t. He flared his wings out, hiss growing.

It cut off with a yelp as Iskall suddenly lunged forward, easily scooping him off the ground. Tommy snarled, thrashing around, but with deft and experienced hands, Iskall maneuvered him into a hold with his hands pinned and teeth away from Iskall’s throat.

“That’s enough.” He said with a sigh. “I know it’s been a long day and the loss of your Comm is stressful. But I’m not going to let you take it out on me.”

Tommy spat out several incoherent swears that would have had Phil smack him over the head with one wing. Iskall just laughed at him. “Back to the nest with you.” He said.

It was unfair how easily Iskall carried him, even with Tommy’s tail thudding against his side and Tommy flailing around. He knew the hermits were strong, he had seen videos of them mining for hours. That took strength and endurance and a certain level of insanity.

It was so much easier to steal diamonds. Why mine for hours?

There was the soft whoosh of wind and a thud. Tommy looked up, catching a flash of red. “False, help!” He yelled, twisting in Iskall’s arms.

And stupidly, for a moment, he thought she would. False paused, glancing between the both of them. Tommy gave her the puppy dog eyes. They were both dragon hybrids, right? Couldn’t that count for something here?

“What’s going on?” She said, raising one eyebrow. Iskall tried to speak but Tommy screeched until he gave up, looking back down at Tommy.

“This wrongun is kidnapping me for no reason!” Tommy yelled, flailing harder. “Get him the fuck off of me!”

“No reason, huh?” False said, looking at Iskall. Tommy opened his mouth to interrupt but it was cut off as False carefully covered his mouth. She smiled down at him but now he could see the darkness lurking around the edges. Were her teeth always so obvious when she smiled?

“He dropped his Comm and then threw a fit that it had broken. And then threw another fit when I said it was time to go back to the nest.” Iskall said, shifting his grip so Tommy was pinned even more than before. “He’s in quite a mood right now.”

“Aw, is someone having a bad day?” False said, shaking her head. “It’s perfectly normal Tommy but I know it can feel kind of scary. We dragons get really attached to our things and it’s terrible to have them broken. I remember one time I broke my ax and cleared out a nearby mine of mobs in a fit of fury. We’ll get your Comm fixed up and it’ll be back with you in no time at all.”

Tommy hissed at her. “Is that normal?” Iskall asked. “Normally, he’s happier with being touched lately.”

“Perfectly fine.” Could they stop fucking talking about him like he wasn’t here? He could hear them! They weren’t exactly being subtle right now! “Something he liked was broken, it’s normal for him to regress a bit and throw a fit. But your instinct was right, the nest is the best place for him right now.”

Tommy licked her hands. False rolled her eyes. “I’ve dealt with Grian, you’ll need to do more than that to phase me.” She said with a roll of her eyes. “Let’s bring him to the nest, it’ll be easier to calm him there. Less chance he’ll panic and lash out.”

“Fuck you!” Tommy yelled as soon as she released him. Insultingly, neither of them acknowledged his yells and Iskall’s gentle walk started again, carrying him closer and closer to that stupid nest room. “Fuck, I thought you were cool, duck you drop- shit, fuck-“

“Language.”

Tommy incoherently screeched back. “Don’t take anything personally right now.” False informed Iskall calmly. “Tommy really isn’t in a state where he can remember that you’re his friends.”

Tommy hissed, hearing the gentle thuds of his tail speed up even faster. But they slipped more often now, striking empty air instead of Iskall.

It was their stupid tricky words that were doing this to him! They tricked him, making him feel guilty for their shitty actions. He was the justified one here! This wasn’t hybrid instincts or crankiness from being tired! This was him being justifiably angry even if he couldn’t say why!

He just, he didn’t want to go to the nest!

But their words snuck in and made his head feel topsyturvy until he wasn’t quite sure. So what if the incoherent animalistic noises of his hybrid side were easier to make now that he was furious at them? So what if Phil had been the same way, dragging him to the nest even when he threw a fit? That didn’t make this right!

(Did it?)

He dug his teeth into his bottom lip, relishing the starburst of clarity that came with it. He had to focus. He wasn’t mad about his Comm being broken, this wasn’t dragon rage. Yeah, he was furious about that but the real fury came from knowing that they were lying to him. False was completely false.

False stopped in front of them, carefully opening the door. "You first." She said, holding it open. "Children take priority."

"Don't tease him right now." Iskall chided, stepping past her. Tommy blinked against the change of light. The inside of Iskall's base was gently lit, the better to accent the elaborate decorations and natural feel.

If there was one good thing, it was that the nest room was kind of complicated to reach. Something he had never given much thought to before but now seemed kind of ominous now. They had to pass through multiple doors, navigating hallways that twisted and turned every which way until Tommy wasn't quite sure where they were walking.

He had never quite thought about how hard it would be to find his way out from the nest room. It had never seemed to matter before and he kicked himself for willingly giving in to the hazy clarity. He tried to cling to the route now, recall every twist and turn but it was hard. Did they turn left there or was it right?

Prime, he could fucking hear Techno in his ear, scoffing at how he used left and right.

Had there always been so many locks on the door?

False went through them one by one, humming as she clicked them open. "Zedaph will be here soon." She said. "But he was busy testing a new game with Tango and Impulse so it'll take a little while for him to make the trip."

"I don't need him here." Tommy said, annoyed. He went limp, a hanging deadweight but Iskall carried him through the door anyways, dropping him on the bed.

If he thought Grian was clingy, False and Zedaph were even worse. One of them was constantly showing up out of the blue, hovering around him. They said it was because dragons had to stick together but now, he was pretty sure they were watching him.

Imprisoning him just like Dream did.

Tommy hissed, rolling over before False could touch his wings. He burrowed into the blanket collection, burying himself under the layers of thin quilts and comforters. They had brought the nest from Ren's house, with new material being added every time he saw it.

(And to think he had felt kinda touched that they had brought it with them. That they had carried enough to pack it into their inventories, wasting valuable space, and arranging it just so in the room.)

He never thought he be fucking relieved about the amount of blankets and pillows in the nest. Usually, they felt a bit smothering. Every single pillow was perfectly plump and soft. The comforters were thick and heavy with down. He had almost been jealous of the craftsmanship behind the quilts, every stitch perfectly even and the patterns beautifully intricate.

But it was just... too much. And usually he spent his time sprawled out on top of the blankets, joking that he needed to let his wings breathe.

“Kid.” Iskall sighed. He could feel the weight of a hand settle on the blankets over his wings. “We’ll be right here when you want us.”

Tommy hissed, lying still. He kept himself frozen until he heard the gentle murmur of conversation start up.

What the fuck was he supposed to do now?

He could bolt but how was he going to get off server. He could absolutely take Iskall and False in a fight, don’t get him wrong, but leaving the server was more of a problem.

Leaving a server meant either admin permission or a series of commands he needed his Comm to run. Tommy pressed his face into his hands. Prime, he had made a stupid fucking mistake knocking his Comm down the Omega Tree.

It had made so much sense at the time. He needed Iskall’s Comm and a good excuse. But then, his Comm had shattered and he’d have to wait for Xisuma to repair it.

Taking who knows how much time.

Hacking? Maybe. But that still needed his Comm to run. If he was an admin, he’d have admin panels and wouldn’t need the Comm. But he wasn’t.

So that meant either getting permission or his Comm back. And he really doubted he was getting the former. What now?

A soft chime. Muffled, but in the darkness of the blanket, it was as loud as a creeper hiss. Tommy wriggled around slightly, his eyes widening when his fingers touched something solid in his pocket.

He had shoved Iskall’s Comm in his pocket when they had reached the ground, not wanting the other to see he was snooping. Tommy shuffled more, easing it out and changing it to silent.

The gentle murmur stayed the same. He could catch a few snatches if he strained but it didn’t sound like they had noticed the comm chime.

“-reminds me of Impulse joining-“

“-I’m worried-“

Gritting his teeth, Tommy powered on the Comm. He didn’t hesitate before clicking on the conversation with Fundy.

ItsFundy: Hey, so, I know we haven’t talked much lately but I need to ask you a question.

Iskall85: Happy to help, but I need to check something. Message you back when I’m free

Iskall85: Fundy

Tommy watched the screen with anticipation. Hopefully Fundy was awake and not pulling another one of his ridiculous all nighter crashes. Fundy could sleep for days at a time after he crashed and he could sleep through almost anything.

But if there was anyone who could get him out of this, it was Fundy. The fox had been halfway to gaining admin status, Wilbur had bragged nonstop about it. He probably could have gotten it if he hadn't joined Dream SMP and stopped messing around with code.

Funny how everything bad came back to joining the Dream SMP. Came back to Dream. He needed to get back there soon.

A chime and he felt something in his chest ease. He was still mad at Fundy for so many reasons but if this worked out, he'd owe the fox hybrid big time.

ItsFundy: My man! How's the redstone?

Iskall85: This isn't Iskall

Iskall85: This is Tommy

ItsFundy: WAT

ItsFundy: That's not a funny joke

Iskall85: Fuck you, im not joking

ItsFundy: Tell me something only you would now.

Oh he had to be kidding him. Tommy tapped his claws against a pillow, wondering what would be the best thing to say. Preferably to make Fundy ever regret asking that question of him.

Well there was that one thing. Tommy grinned wickedly.

Iskall85: Your mother was a salmon

Iskall85: wilbur married a fish

Iskall85: Sally the salmon

ItsFundy: STOOOOOP

ItsFundy: NOOOOO

Iskall85: Never question me again. The biggest man is not to be questioned

ItsFundy: I thought you were dead!! Of course I questioned this! Ghostbur was weird enough I don't need my Comm possessed!

What? Tommy stared at his Comm screen, lost for words for a moment. Fundy thought he was dead? But how? He had been messaging everyone at least once a day. Why would they think he was dead?

Iskall85: I'm not fucking dead

Iskall85: why would you think that

Iskall85: big men never die

ItsFundy: There was a weird message sent to our comms and it look like a glitched out death message.

ItsFundy: And I'm talking glitched, I couldn't even unscramble this

Iskall85: and

ItsFundy: When we found your camp, there was a huge tower

ItsFundy: You've been gone for a month

Fuck.

He had forgotten about the tower. Tommy pressed his head to the pillow for a moment, pulling the jagged pieces of himself back together. He was pinned under blankets in the nest. He could hear Iskall and False talking still.

He wasn't on the tower. He had to get it together before Zedaph showed up because knowing Zedaph, he'd throw himself on top of him and ruin everything.

But.

A fucking month. A full month. He had thought it was way shorter than that. Sure the days had started blending together at some point but surely- A month. What had happened on the server in a full month?

Iskall85: Rumors of my death have been greatly exaggerated.

ItsFundy: You're telling me

ItsFundy: Tubbo is gonna be ecstatic

And didn't that make him lock up. Because if they weren't seeing his messages, then Tubbo wasn't- Tubbo wasn't replying because he hated him. And that was the best news he had heard all day.

Iskall85: Listen, I need to go home

Iskall85: But the hermits are being fucking cagey bastards and they're not letting me off server

Iskall85: can you help?

This was it. The moment of truth. If Fundy would pick him over whatever friendship he had with Iskall. Go up against another server to save the uncle who he betrayed before for Schlatt.

But also the person who had spoken up against his exile. Who had been willing to fight then.

But it was... the hermits. They weren't good at fighting but they were a pretty big deal. Helping him now would mean hacking into a server who viciously protected their borders.

For once, his instincts were completely silent. Waiting for what was next.

ItsFundy: You kidding me?

His heart stopped. He was already moving to texting out a long angry rant when the second response came through.

ItsFundy: I can hack in

ItsFundy: Name a time and place

Chapter End Notes

I've been so excited for this.

Chaos and Changes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy is a bundle of nerves and he feels like it's so obvious that everyone can see it. He keeps knocking over cups everyone gives him, fumbles his tools so hard that Iskall benched him, and accidentally tripped over Zedaph when the other was taking a 'dragon snooze'.

The worst part is that he couldn't even say why. It was clear to the hermits that something was up but they kept accepting his stupid little rushed excuses. He needed to start sitting down and nailing down a story if this kept happening because he wasn't sure that Iskall wasn't about to take him straight to Xisuma and demand another code check.

And he was not submitting to another code check anytime soon. No way, no how.

It had been two days since he had finished his conversation with Fundy. He had wiped all the messages clean after they had finished. Iskall had found his Comm laying innocently by the bed, a sneaky little drop that Tommy did when Zedaph distracted everyone by slamming open the door and body slamming False.

But he was still no closer to figuring out how exactly to distract the hermits while he did it.

Well. He had a plan. But she wasn't much of a fan of it even if it was looking more and more like the only choice.

Fundy had agreed easily enough to do the hacking. But he warned that he might need Tommy's help. Apparently Fundy and Iskall had been longtime friends? Which, so unfair. His nephew definitely should have shared that he was friends with someone as cool as the hermits. Fundy had then pointed out that he was in Hermitcraft, an opportunity Fundy never had, but in his right opinion, that point was moot. Being on the server was a thing of the now and Fundy and Iskall had known each other for years!

Right, back to what was making him so jittery that his claws were leaving little dents on the breakfast table.

Because Fundy couldn't get onto Hermitcraft, he would have to hack in from the outside. Which was... risky. Fundy knew that and Tommy definitely knew that. He still wasn't sure what stopped Xisuma from killing him for accidentally glitching him and Fundy said he definitely wouldn't have Iskall's permission to access the server, something necessary for most new people to join.

Add in how weirdly secretive the hermits were and it was a match made in hell. It was slightly easier in that Fundy wasn't trying to get in, just pull a player who was willing to go, out. But the problem was that Xisuma could still cause havoc if he figured out what was going on and interfered.

Hence, Tommy needing to figure out how to distract everyone, specifically Xisuma, while Fundy grabbed him. Something that would hopefully be happening tonight.

Honestly, it wasn't that he was against it. The hard part was setting up for the biggest, best prank ever in that it would hit as many people as possible without warning them first. He needed something that would hold their attention.

But without tipping them off, he had no idea how to get his hands on the materials. Iskall had been majorly smothering the last two days. He was pretty sure the other hadn't been tipped off by the messages. He had snagged one or two things from around the base that he was certain wouldn't be missed but judging by the looks Iskall gave him, it had been noticed. Maybe.

Pretty sure.

At the very least, he was certain whatever facade they were putting on would have cracked by now. But the problem was that Iskall no longer gave him any alone time. At all. Which meant no time to sneak all the materials for the sort of plan he was considering or any other plan. And every time he tried to leave, Iskall would drag him back and then he'd get locked in the nest for another nap. Needless to say, Tommy was not a happy little dragon hybrid.

But today, he had a plan. A plan for the plan. By this evening, he'd have everything he would need to cause the biggest distraction possible and finally go home.

He resisted the urge to huff when Iskall came back, holding two plates. "Pancakes again today." He said, setting them down. "I know we had them yesterday but you enjoyed them so much I figured we'd do them again."

"That's because pancakes are Pog." Tommy said, picking up the entire pancake with his hands and cramming down his throat. If there was one thing he'd definitely miss, it would have to be the food. The pancakes were perfectly sweet and it had that little spiciness that Iskall said was cinnamon. "Thank you."

That made Iskall smile which was perfect because this was just step one to his master plan. Tommy swallowed his bite of pancake with a happy little sigh, beginning to tuck into another one. "Maybe we can do chocolate chip pancakes tomorrow." Iskall said. "I've been meaning to do some more trading with Grian and he always keeps chocolate chips on hand, I'm not sure why."

"Sounds good, big man." Tommy said in between bites of his pancake. It tasted a little worse now. A little drier, like ashes in his mouth. He swallowed hard, looking up. "So, what's in the plans today? You got anything big planned?"

"Not particularly, why?" Iskall said, tilting his head. "I was just going to work on adding leaves and then I was thinking we could go swing by Zedaph's base."

"That sounds cool." Tommy said slowly, playing it cool. He was the coolest. They cold him the president of being ice cold because he was so cold that now one could handle him. He had this in the bag. "But I was wondering if we could go by the shopping district today?"

“The shopping district?” Iskall said, rubbing his chin. “Why the shopping district? You never mentioned wanting to go there before.”

“Well, yeah, but Grian and Scar told me all about it and it sounded really cool.” Tommy argued. He had this in the bag. Sure, he hadn’t been allowed to go anywhere else other than Zedaph base after an incident where he nearly tripped off the Omega Tree but that was nothing!

Seeing Iskall’s hesitance, he played his trump card: “Grian also told me there was a music disc shop there and said I could look into getting new music discs. My music discs are still in my old server and I kind of miss getting to listen to them.”

That got Iskall to soften a bit. “I’ll message Zedaph and tell him we’ll be visiting the shopping district instead.” Iskall said, taking a quick bite of his own breakfast. “It shouldn’t be too out of the way and I need to pick up some more building materials anyways. If you finish your breakfast soon, we should be able to get there within the hour.”

“Fuck yes, you won’t regret this big man.” Tommy said, beaming. Oh yes he will, he thought, because Iskall was laying the seeds of his own destruction.

Or pranking. Whatever. Destruction sounded so much better in his head.

He crammed down the last two pancakes, ignoring Iskall’s warning to chew. He had sharp teeth, he was pretty sure he didn’t need to chew anymore. He pushed back from the table as soon as he was done. “I’m gonna say bye to Henry before I go, I won’t be far.”

“Wait a second.” Iskall said. He paused when Tommy gave him puppy dog eyes. Or, baby dragon eyes as Zedaph called them.

“I’ll just be in the next room over.” He said. “And I want to have more time with him before we go.”

“You could bring him along if you want.” Iskall said, confused. He stabbed at a pancake. “It wouldn’t be that hard, we’re taking the land route anyways.”

“No, I don’t think Henry wants to leave his aviary today. He was all cuddled up and snoozing earlier.” Tommy said with a heavy heart. As soon as Iskall nodded a reluctant yes, he was sprinting to the aviary that had been tucked in beside the kitchen.

Like the other hermits, Iskall really went all out on everything. The aviary was a veritable jungle with plenty of perches, fresh water, and little nooks in the branches where seeds or treats could be placed. The best little kingdom for the best little parrot.

That didn’t mean it made the goodbye any easier. Tommy took a deep breath, carefully stepping up to the little nest Henry had made himself. The bird pulled his head out from under his wing, chirping slightly. “Bye, little buddy.” Tommy said, trying to force down the lump in his throat.

He stroked Henry's soft feathers, taking a deep breath. He wasn't going to cry. There was just a lot of dust in the room and it was making his eyes water a bit.

Henry was such a good bird. Such a good boy. He had asked if there was any way to bring the bird along but Fundy had warned that it would be near impossible. Trying to drag out a willing player was way harder than carefully removing one pet but it would still be incredibly difficult, even if they were attached to that one player. The risk for Henry getting hurt was way too high, especially if Xisuma caught in and interfered.

It would just take time they didn't have. Fundy was already rushing to get everything ready to get Tommy out. There was no way to get them both quickly.

So this would have to be goodbye. Hopefully the hermits would take good care of him after he was gone. Tommy pulled some watermelon seeds out of his inventory, letting Henry eat from his hand.

"Be good." He whispered. One day, he'll get Henry back. When the glitch was gone, when Dream was gone, and he was ready, he'd hack Henry out of the server himself no matter how long it took.

The bird let out another sleepy little coo, eagerly snapping up the seeds. It took everything in him to pull away, trying not to think of another two Henry's who he had to part from. At least this wouldn't be a permanent one if he had any choice in the matter.

He really wanted to take him to the shopping district. He really did. But it was too risky Henry would get hurt or panic during the distraction. And honestly, Tommy was pretty sure his heart would break having to watch Henry right before he abandoned him

Tommy took a big step back. "Bye, Henry. Stay Pog." He said. The parrot made a curious little chirping noise but Tommy was already bolting out of the room, trying to make it look casual.

He slowed his pace down, closing the door behind him. It felt like his heart was beating at a million miles per second. Today was going to go fine, he promised himself. He had a plan and everything. Tubbo would be proud of him.

All he had to do was wait till dusk fell. As soon as the sky started turning into twilight, Fundy would break him out of the server.

That is, if Fundy was telling the truth.

"Not like that." Tommy mumbled to himself. If he started wrapping himself in circles over Fundy's honesty, he'd never calm down. There was no way to tell if the other was telling the truth and he wasn't willing to abroga his chance at getting home because he couldn't trust him. If Fundy was lying, he would definitely pay for it but the plan needed both of them right now.

"Everything okay?" He heard. Tommy jumped, looking up. Iskall was poking his head out of the kitchen area, looking at him. His brow was creased in concern.

Fake concern, Tommy tried to remind his heart. Fake concern. Like Dream. Dream who wasn't his friend, who manipulated him.

"I'm fine, I think Henry might be getting too chubby on those seeds though. How's he going to pick up the lady birds?" Tommy said innocently. He laughed when he heard an indignant squawk through the door. "I'm kidding buddy! Have as many seeds as you want, it won't stop you from being the most Pog bird ever."

Please buy it.

Thankfully, Iskall relaxed a bit, looking back into the kitchen. "Well, dishes are handled so if you're ready, I'm happy to head out now."

"Awesome!" Tommy said, strolling over. "Let's blow this popsicle stand."

God, he hoped his tail wasn't giving him away. It had been so restless the less few days, constantly twitching and hitting things. Zedaph and False had been ferreting out what was making him sad and he had to say he missed his home server.

It was true. They just didn't need to know he was also thinking in the current context of going back to it.

Other excuses included missing Henry, wondering where Grian was, and at one point, being sad his Comm was broken. It was fixed now, thankfully.

They headed down the stairs, ducking out the door. And wasn't that something weird he had grown used to. No one locked doors on Hermitcraft. It wasn't exactly a good deterrent to anyone looking to steal or place traps but it at least signaled you'd be mad at it.

Ren had laughed when he asked and pointed out no one was worried about others stealing. They had plenty of resources to go around.

"How far is it to the shopping district anyways?" Tommy asked, shading his eyes from the sun. Hopefully not too far.

"Shouldn't be far at all, we can take a boat part way there and do some hiking. I already checked with Doc and he said you're good to go as long as you stick close by and don't wander off too far." Iskall said. As he said that, he reached over and picked up Tommy's hand.

Tommy stiffened, but slowly relaxed. "I've never wandered off once in my life. How dare you slander me." He claimed. Iskall laughed, not removing his tight grip.

Prime, this made his cheeks burn. Being treated like some baby who couldn't be trusted to walk on his own. "You don't need to hold my hand." Tommy said with a huff, annoyance barely leaking through.

"It's just for safety." Iskall said. "Remember, Xisuma said you need to be a bit more flexible about things like touch. How can I help you if I'm not near you."

“You could do that without holding my hand.” Tommy grumbled. Iskall gave him a disappointed look but didn’t remove it. Fucking figures.

Just a bit longer, he remembered himself. Just a bit longer. And then he’d blow this popsicle stand.

Iskall and him ended up riding in the same boat. Unlike most of the hermit items, the boat was at least normal.

“None of us see much point in customizing them, we don’t use boats much.” Iskall said. Tommy seethed under the subtle jab. He couldn’t use elytra like the rest of them and they had forbidden him from trying to fly.

The elytra just couldn’t fit well over his wings. Zedaph said there were ways to modify them but then immediately denied him the chance, saying one wrong move would put strain on his developing wings.

It felt like everything put strain on his developing wings and he was so sick of it.

“Maybe we could stop by the cookie shop.” Iskall said, watching before them as the boy drifted downstream. “You’ll love it, he’s done this clever little trick with the counters so they look like they’re made out of chocolate. It’s absolutely incredible.”

“Can’t wait to see it.” Tommy said, keeping his smile on. He manages to hold it even when they start hiking and only drops it when they reach the shopping district.

Prime, he will never get used to this.

If he thought the mega bases were terrifying, the shopping district is ten times worse. It was jam packed with all kinds of buildings. Each of them growing more and more complicated.

He just felt so small next to them. Some were careful, huge and blasting their presence like Eret’s rainbow castle. Others were more simple, but no less ornate, straight out of one of the most medieval server. Each were absolutely incredible.

They even had paths that put the prime path to shame. The prime path was big and beautiful and he’d hear no words against it. But he had to admit, the hermits could build some nice paths. Each one was carefully textured and detailed and just fit well together.

The only thing off was...

“Why is some of the ground purple?” Tommy asked, confused. “And why are there tons of sheep roaming around?”

Iskall laughed, shaking his head. “That’s the Mycelium War.” He said. His smile eased a bit when he saw how Tommy twitched a bit at the last word. “It’s a prank war. Some of the hermits insist that the ground in the shopping district should be mycelium but Scar, he’s the mayor of the shopping district, and his crew says that it should be grass blocks.”

“And he’s wrong!” Tommy nearly jumped out of his skin. Grian landed next to him throwing one arm over his shoulder. “Hi fledgeling!”

“Hey Grian.” Tommy said, trying for a smile but falling just a bit short when he saw the ground again. “Aren’t you... worried?”

“Why?” Grian said, rocking back and forth on his heels. Iskall rolled his eyes. “About Scar winning? Because he definitely won’t, the Mother Spore knows what he’s doing and our plans are as hard to defeat as the shadows themselves!”

“No, about being in the shopping district when you’re at war. You’re not even wearing armor, you could be killed so easily here.” Tommy pointed out. Sure, they said they had infinite lives but why just lose them so quickly? Was it pure stupidity?

“Oh, Tommy.” Grian said. He nudged Tommy’s shoulder. “This isn’t a real war. Not like your old server. It’s just a prank war. No one’s really taking it seriously, we just set up elaborate schemes and build bases and roleplay like we’re enemies. And you know what?”

“What?”

“In a bit I’m going to go visit Scar. And he’s probably going to buy stuff from my shop in the shopping district. Because at the end of the day, we’re still friends. We’re just having fun right now.” Grian said with a shrug. “No one takes anything personally.”

“I-I don’t fucking get it.” Tommy said with a huff, surveying the ground. So they were just... faking a war? To have fun and build? Why? Wars sucked and you had to resource grind and people died.

“You will eventually.” Grian said. “You can be on the mycelium resistance side if you want! We’re not doing anything big right now but more people to spread the mushroom is always nice.”

“Stop trying to recruit people.” Iskall said, rolling his eyes. “We’re just here to run some errands. You can recruit him later but I need to check if the barge is sold out of gravel and sand. I need it for a project.”

“You’re in luck! We just stocked up.” Grian said, grinning. He winked at Tommy. “The barge is my shop, you’ll love it.”

“I’ll be the judge of that.” Tommy said, rolling his eyes.

Fuck, he did love it.

It was a massive ship, the wood gently creaking and swaying in the current. The colorful sails bloomed under the sunlight, unfurled to their full capacity. The deck was jam packed with chests and Grian dropped down to sit on one.

“Sorry about the mess, I carried a bit more than I thought I had for the restock so I added a few temporary chests to hold the overflow before it gets sold.” Grian said, waving a hand at the deck.

“What do you need the concrete for anyways?” Tommy asked, stepping onto the deck. The wood creaked under his feet but held stable. He kind of felt like a pirate. Grian perked up, leaning forward.

“I was wondering that too! You don’t need more leaf blocks?”

As soon as they were distracted, Tommy backed towards one of the unattended chests, just out of their view. Working quickly, he looked inside the chest, trying to be subtle and look like he was just a curious onlooker.

It only held a few slips of paper and dirt blocks. Useless. But the next one, he hit the jackpot. Sand. Stacks and stacks of sand.

He pulled out only one stack. He didn’t need much more than that. Tommy put some watermelon seeds in it’s place, feeling a bit bad he couldn’t pay. But who the hell paid diamonds for sand?

...the hermits did. Bunch of rich people.

It was the next three chests down that he got really lucky. A stack and a half, barely, of gunpowder. Tossed in absentmindedly, a hastily scribbled on piece of paper next to it. Fuck yeah.

Tommy pulled it out, again replacing it with watermelon seeds. It wasn’t much. Prime, he already knew from his calculations that it would be barely enough to be an ambush on the Dream SMP. Not even a full stack of tnt really.

But he didn’t need a full stack to make a distraction.

(He didn’t want to go that far.)

By the time Grian and Iskall finished their rambling building plans, Tommy was innocently poking around the deck of the ship, the sand and gunpowder hidden in his inventory.

“Now,” Iskall said. “It’s time you got to see the rest this place has to offer.”

And the worst part about his last day on the server? It’s nice. It’s... amazing even.

He almost forgets about the sand and gunpowder in his inventory as Iskall and Grian drag him through every shop. From the promised bakery (and oh, Niki would have loved it) to Xisuma’s bee shop to a shop filled with music discs.

They bought him every single music disc and a jukebox to go with them. Tommy couldn’t deny it around the solid lump in his throat and Grian’s denials that he had plenty of diamonds and nothing to use them on. They saw Scar, who goofily threatened Grian while giggling, Xisuma in a bee themed shop, even someone called Cleo who showed him around a few of the shops and told him that he should go see Joe’s wolf sanctuary. Thankfully she had left to go work on her build because she was terrifying.

It would be easier to be angry and righteous if they weren't so... so nice. If they were more like Wilbur during Pogtopia or Techno's... just in general. (He didn't know when Techno turned from his kind brother to what they were now). He had to grit his teeth, remind himself not to explode yet, and remember the videos.

Those stupid videos. He glared at Grian's Comm, wondering if they had videos of him too.

"Everything good?" Grian said, glancing at him. Tommy forced a tired smile.

"Fine, big man. I'm gonna go check out the chests in that corner." He said, already turning. He didn't bother opening the chests, instead leaning against him.

It was almost evening time. He had already crafted the tnt by sneaking to the crafting tables in some of the shops whenever he could catch a moment out of view. In the first slot of his inventory, a flint and steel looked back at him, swiped out of Iskall's kitchen.

It was now or never. If Fundy was telling the truth, he had to start the distraction now. Tommy pushed himself off the chest, taking a deep breath. All he had to do was light up some tnt, dodge Grian and Iskall, and be a general menace until evening hit. Tommy could do that, easy.

He wouldn't touch the shops. That would be the payment for their niceness.

With one last breath, he pushed off the chest and bolted. The moment he went for the door he heard a loud clattering behind him because of fucking course they were watching him.

"Tommy?"

"Where are you going?"

He got ten blocks away from the shop before lighting the first tnt. The crackling explosion was so loud, he nearly fumbled the flint and steel, before catching it again.

"Tommy!" Tommy threw himself to the side, narrowly dodging Grian's dive. The hermit crashed to the ground, one powerful flap bringing them airborne again and terrifyingly close. "Tommy, calm down! You're okay!"

"Fuck you!" Tommy yelled back. He tossed another piece of tnt down, lighting it up before sprinting away to avoid Iskall. And fuck, that guy was way faster than he should be. He dodged to the side, using a bush for cover as he placed his next block down.

"Hey, hey." Iskall said, spreading his hands as he watched. "Tommy, you're okay. You need to calm down."

"Okay! I haven't been okay since I learned you were lying to me!" Tommy said, his voice jumping into an inhuman shriek. A click, and he was running away from the next explosion.

He couldn't light the next one before Grian was swooping down, trying to grab him again. Tommy flung himself into a clumsy roll, narrowly dodging under Grian's grasping hands.

“Tommy, we never lied to you!” Grian said and there was something so desperately sad about his voice that it nearly made Tommy lock up halfway through lighting the next block.

He glared at them. “You didn’t lie to me? Explain the fucking videos of me being sick! Explain how fucking controlling you are! EXPLAIN HOW YOU KNEW ONE OF MY FRIENDS AND WHERE MY SERVER WAS AND WOULDN’T LET ME GO HOME.”

Three blocks went up this time until Tommy had to start running in earnest because wow, those fuckers were fast. Iskall ran straight through an explosion without even fucking flinching.

“Tommy, we can explain!”

“I’m tired of listening to you.” Tommy shrieked back. He slid to a stop, pulling out the next block and slapping it down on the ground. He clicked the flint and steel-

A cold armored hand grabbed his, squeezing until he gasped in pain and dropped it. The other arm wrapped around him, trapping him in a one armed hug.

“I think someone needs to go inside.” The mechanical voice was disappointed and chilled at ice.

“Let go of me.” Tommy yelled, flailing. He could see Grian and Iskall approaching, another hermit off to the side that he knew to be Etho from the hermit videos. Fuck, this was bad.

He tried to go limp, slither out of Xisuma’s grip but the other refused to let go. Instead tightening their grip no matter how much he kicked and struggled. “I know it’s hard.” Xisuma said, ignoring Tommy’s hiss. “But you need to calm down. We’re here to help you.”

“Fuck you.” Tommy said. He tried to bite Xisuma, but his teeth couldn’t get through the armor. His wings were pinned, even his tail was smacking uselessly at the other. This fucking sucked.

“Calm down.” Xisuma repeated, starting to lower them both down. “You’re okay. We can talk about this. I know this seems scary.”

“No.” Tommy said. There was an odd fizzing feeling in his stomach. “We’re not going to talk about this.

A rug. An angry yell. The world dissolved into static.

Tommyinnit has left the server.

It was really fun writing this chapter! Especially exploring Tommy while he's going through stress and guilt and figuring out what he wants.

Poisonous Green

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Panic attack, mild disassociation

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy hit the ground with a wheeze, trying to roll and then having the oh shit moment when he remembered that he had a pair of big ass wings and a tail.

Thankfully, someone came to his rescue. “Hey are you okay- holy shit.” Tommy finally managed to arrange himself in a sitting position, ignoring their panic to focus on the fact that he felt like his body had been put through a mob dungeon that had been spawning mobs for hours.

In one word. Ow.

He knew it hurt going from world to world but he never thought how much it would hurt to get dragged out of one. Tommy took a few moments to take a deep breath, flinching a little at the lingering buzzy feelings in his limbs before looking up.

“Why the fuck are you panicking.” Is the first thing he says after seeing his nephew for the first time in weeks.

Fundy was wide eyed, so wide that he could see the whites of his eyes. He flailed widely, narrowly avoiding smacking the glowing screens still hovering around his hands.

Damn, those were some nice coding screens. Tommy eyed them enviously. You could do a lot of crime with that.

Fundy made an odd choking sound. “Why do you have wings?” He said, glancing at the code screens. “You- did I fuck this up that badly?”

“Absolutely.” Tommy said. And Fundy’s face crumbles. He lets his nephew sit in that for a moment before leaning back and saying: “Nah, this is normal for me.”

“Oh, you fucker.” Fundy said, the absolute regret wiping away in a second. Tommy laughed, dodging under Fundy’s halfhearted swipe at his head. “But why do you have wings?”

“Well, when a mommy hybrid and a daddy hybrid like each other very much-“

“Tommy, please. If I or they messed something up, I really have to know. You’ve been human your entire life, you should have manifested before and manifesting now- that’s some seriously messed up shit if they did that to you.” And for the first time, Tommy sees how

stressed out Fundy looks. The fox hybrid droops in on themselves, one hand coming up to rub under their eyes. He can practically see the eye and under their fur and their clothes are rumpled. Even their movements are jittery and dragging.

He pursed his lips. Fine, he'd be a good uncle and take some pity on Fundy. "Apparently, there was a code lock preventing my manifestation. They talked me into taking it off and manifesting there."

"A code lock?" Fundy echoed. Tommy stiffened up, wondering if that was yet another lie. "Why would anyone put a code lock on you?"

"Why would you think? Would you do it?" Tommy said, folding his arms. His tail lashed in the air behind him.

Technically, Fundy could have. They had clearly shown to be way better at this coding thing than he thought. And he had clearly shown himself carefully of betraying people who were doing the right thing.

"What- no? Why would I do that?" Fundy said, jerking back to stare at Tommy. "I wouldn't have been able to anyways, remember? By the time I started studying code, you were already old enough to have started showing hybrid traits. There's no way I could have locked down your code that much, if for some prone forsaken reason I wanted to."

"Fuck, you're right." Tommy said scowling. He could clearly remember when Fundy had started coding because in the beginning, Wilbur had gotten into a massive snot about it. You would have thought the fox had decided to betray his server and declare himself an independent country for some reason.

Tommy had been the one to pass along what resources and tricks he still knew until Fundy started finding people he could talk to. It was the closest thing they had to bonding time.

But Fundy was right. Maybe. Tommy wasn't quite sure what manifesting would have been like, because someone fucked it up for him, but it was unlikely the fox could have caught it before he hit the prime age of going through that excruciating agony.

"Well, that narrows it down some." Tommy said. "Now I've only got three other possible suspects."

Fundy grimaced. "Yeah, this server is fucked up." He said, looking around. "I had to go thousands of blocks away from everyone to do the coding because I was worried Dream would catch on and finally try to challenge me for it."

Tommy snorted. "Sounds like the fucker. Just another exile." He said with a huff. No wonder he hadn't recognized the taiga where they were sitting. Fundy must have traveled far to hit somewhere that had absolutely no signs of other players.

"Right." Fundy said, rubbing a hand against his eye again. "Do you want me to do something about it?"

“Do something about it?” Tommy asked warily, claws curling slightly. It echoed all those bad nightmares where he woke up still in exile and Dream said *put your things in the hole* Tommy and he would say that he didn’t have anything and Dream would pull out an ax and say that he was lying and-

He nearly jumped out of his skin as something shrieked, shrill and high, in front of him. Fundy looked a little sheepish. “You good man?”

“Fine.” Tommy said, glaring down at himself. His skin felt oddly itchy. It was so strange not to have someone constantly touching him. Fundy just liked to shriek at people for a distraction. “You said something?”

“Yeah, I could try to code temporary disguises around your wings, it’s the same code MCC would use to lock down hybrid traits without erasing them for the games.” Fundy said, glancing back at his screen. “Or I could see about modifying them slightly, add permanent invisibility or something.”

“I-“ Tommy took a deep breath. Because on one hand, he longed to accept it. To go back to when he was normal and human and everything that came with it. No more instincts, no more stupid “touch starvation”, no more lizard brain. Be the Tommy he had always been, the one who went toe to toe with hybrids and legends and won.

But the other half of him screamed no. That this had been unfairly stolen from him. He had been meant to be an Ender dragon hybrid. If it wasn’t for someone blocking his code, he always would have been.

And how useful could it still be? To someday be able to fly away from danger like Phil. To have the increased speed and strength that Zedaph and False so casually flaunted. Zedaph said once his scales hardened, they could even be equal to iron armor.

Hiding them felt like letting the other person win. Telling them that it was okay that they locked down his code because even he preferred to be human. And it was stupid because no one was really winning or losing here but it felt like it. To throw his... inhumanity to the side because they stopped him from ever having it.

Tommy slowly shrugged. “I’d rather you fucking not.” He said. “I can handle everyone else.”

It just... felt wrong.

Besides, he told himself, if one of them had done it, then revealing the change would reveal who had done it, right? Wilbur was a pretty shitty liar and he got it from Phil. Dream- Dream probably wouldn’t hide if he was mad, right? He didn’t think so.

“Yeah, yeah I can see that.” Fundy said awkwardly coughing. “It- yeah, I have no idea what to tell you. It might not be super safe but then what’s super safe on this server anymore?”

“What happened?” Tommy said, jolting to his feet. He lurched forward, grabbing Fundy. “Did something happen to Tubbo?”

Did Dream fucking do something to him? He couldn't have, right? Fundy would have told him! But it had been so long anything could have happened.

Tubbo was only on two lives and he wasn't like Hermitcraft where they got infinite lives to play with as they wanted. Dying here meant death for real.

"No, fuck no. Tubbo- I can't say he's doing okay but nothing major has happened." Fundy said, trying to push Tommy off of him. "He's not taking the news of your death well and it really messed him up bad."

"He believed Dream?"

Fundy gave him a look that made the tower loom in his memory. "I don't think he really- he tried to keep positive. Ones said multiple times that he doesn't believe your dead, but it doesn't help that you just kind of... disappeared. And after that, he kind of spiraled into finding a reason."

"A reason." Tommy said numbly. Reason for what?

"He called it the butcher's army, I think he kind of went overboard on the idea of making a statement like you pushed him to do with before the whole exile thing. Went after Techno which failed really badly. Like seriously bad." Fundy said, rambling. "And then he was putting up the idea that we go after Dream next but Dream's been acting... off lately?"

"How fucking off?" Tommy said. The last time Dream was acting off, he snuck stacks of tnt to Wilbur while pretending to be an ally. Off was pretty serious when he came to Dream.

"It makes sense in retrospect, knowing you fell into another server. But dreams been seriously wrapped up in checking the code. I probably would have noticed if I wasn't keeping an eye on him for The Who army plan because he keeps sneaking off to hidden areas. And then he just sits there and looks. It's why I believed you, other than the embarrassing story don't bring that up, because it makes sense he'd be searching if you escaped." Fundy said, waving his hands so fast he nearly smacked Tommy in the face. His code windows flickered and disappeared. "I did my best to hide your reentry but he might notice it soon."

"Fine." Tommy said. He wasn't a coward. If Dream wanted to face him, he could come out and do it. He wasn't going to hide behind code and pretend like he didn't exist.

"Right. Well, we can start heading back if you want?" Fundy said, revealing a few Ender pearls. "I stocked up on as many as I could before leaving."

"Oh, just give me a shulker." Tommy said reflexively, already used to the casual way the hermits threw them around. Iskall was constantly giving him a shoulder box full of leaf blocks, joking that he needed more people to carry all the leaves he needed.

Fundy stared at him blankly. "A what?" Fundy said, confused.

"Oh, nothing." Tommy said, holding his hands out for the Ender pearls. He checked his inventory when he put them in, sighing when he saw that it was completely empty. His

inventory must have been completely deleted by the glitch and the Hermitcraft one didn't cross over. It was a good thing he should have anything too valuable, nothing he couldn't hack back in later.

He never would have thought he'd be happy not to have his discs in his inventory. His Ender chest should still be intact.

"Right." Fundy said, shaking himself. "Right so if I mapped this out correctly--"

Tommy threw the Ender Pearl, relishing in the jarring feeling of landing. In crashing to the ground at a run and feeling his body push to the limits.

It was strangely exhilarating in the way Ender Pearl travel always was. Even with a voice that sounded suspiciously like Grian nagging about his still present health lock, he loved the free feeling more.

The hermits hated when he did this, saying boats and elytras were safer.

Well now they weren't here and he could do whatever he wanted! Tommy whooped, throwing himself into his sprint. It was still clunky with his wings, not quite built for sprinting like this as the wind pulled and tugged.

He found himself settling into bursts of speed between throws, rolling his eyes on how Fundy quickly caught up.

"You cheating with hybrid skills?" Tommy teased, remembering how quick Fundy had been on his feet. The natural stealth that had come to him as a fox hybrid, and how Tommy and Tubbo used to throw a fit when Fundy always won every race.

How miserable Fundy was when Dream told him he needed to work on dialing back his natural advantages, be something more fair. Rules that were so inconsistently applied.

It had felt so normal at the time because Wilbur had nagged Fundy too, already irritated with the fox always outrunning him or turning invisible to avoid awkward conversations. But now, he could almost hear Ren's quiet condemnation in his ear. That no one should have done that to him, even if it was for a 'good reason'.

And it annoyed him because he was tired of questioning his memories.

"So, uh--" Fundy said, settling in next to Tommy. "What was Iskall like?"

"Don't you know that?" And Tommy couldn't quite keep the sharp bite out of his tone. "You're friends after all. Chat buddies."

"We didn't chat that much." Fundy said, defensively. He paused for their next teleportation before continuing. "And we mostly talked about redstoning. He never once mentioned getting a new player and we only met a couple times in person."

But there was a strange sadness to his voice, the same sadness he had when Wilbur would refuse to let him do modding or when Wilbur had refused to let him fight.

Tommy couldn't help his scowl. "He was a bitch." He said. "Neh, neh, neh don't do this, don't do that."

Never wanted him to do much of anything. The thought curdled in his stomach.

"Yeah. Uh, yeah, I can see that." Fundy mumbled, looking away. Oof, the fox must have had it bad or something.

"Not a big deal." Tommy said with a shrug. But after a moment, he slows to a stop, wings flapping out to slow him even further. Taking him from a sprint to a walk.

"What's wrong?" Fundy said, slowing to a trot and circling back to see him. "Why did you stop? Are you hurt? Did the coding go wrong?"

"No." Tommy said. A frown creased his face. "I- can you hear that? I thought you said we were alone here? Or was that a fucking lie?"

"A lie?" Fundy said. But even as he begins to speak, Tommy can catch the moment he registers noise in front of them. Nothing loud or too obvious but someone slowly drawing closer through the trees. They weren't alone out here. "That's impossible. I told everyone I was feeling sick. I even stepped down from the cabinet. Nobody should have followed me."

"Someone did." Tommy said, crouching. His hands flexed. He didn't have weapons but he had claws and fangs right now and those would just have to be enough.

He couldn't take a chance right now. If Fundy was followed, it wasn't just to say hello. Someone either wanted to corner him when he was alone or found out that Fundy was retrieving Tommy. And either way, that was a Huge Problem.

He stalked through the trees, ignoring the silence of Fundy creeping alongside him. He was near soundless, some more primal part of his brain enjoying the slow creep. Whispering of hiding in shadows that should be void black, using trees (pillars) for cover.

Tommy waits as the person walks closer. And then he strikes.

He bowled over the person, wings flapping to try and give him momentum. They scream as they go down to the floor and Tommy swears, having to lean his entire weight on them to keep them pinned. Just a bit more and he could-

"Tommy! Tommy--"

Warm paws wrap around his shoulders and Tommy actually looks at who he is pinning down. His breath freezes in his chest.

Warm brown hair. Goat horns, still chipped from the forewords that left the crawling scars alongside one side of his face. And a green sweater that he thought to be long abandoned for a suit and tie.

"Tubbo?" He whispers.

“Tommy?” Tubbo answers, face shining with tears. Tommy’s anger and frustration lasts one more moment before he collapses into him, wrapping him into an awkward hug. Tubbo wasn’t complaining, not when he hugged back just as firmly.

“I thought you were dead.” Tubbo whispered, his voice shaking. “I thought you were dead and the last thing I had said to you was an argument. I thought that was it and I would never see you again and I hated every fucking abysmal minute.”

“I had an adventure.” Tommy whispered. Right now, exile, the pillar, the hermits, none of them mattered. Not in this moment. “I’ll tell you all about it later.”

“If you ever leave me like that again, I’ll kill you myself.” Tubbo said.

“If I’m dead?”

“You think that would stop me? I’d break into limbo itself to torment you. Nowhere is safe from me. Bitch.” Tubbo answered, finally pulling away. But he still holds Tommy’s hands, brutally tight.

“This is sweet and all.” Fundy interjected. “But I feel like we have some more important questions. Like how you knew where we were.”

Tubbo’s face darkened. “Don’t think I forgot that you lied to me.” He said. “Why didn’t you tell me what was going on? I would have helped you.”

“I didn’t know who I could trust! I was breaking so many laws of this server and another server and you and Quackity had wrapped yourself up in the whole butcher’s army thing. I felt better doing this alone.”

Tommy winced. That was definitely not going to make Tubbo happy. You’d think the other would be better at lying. Tommy had certainly given them enough scamming tips.

“I had to hear it from Dream of all people!” Tubbo screams back. And Tommy freezes, going very still and very cold.

“Dream?” He whispered, not quite hearing himself. Dream had told Tubbo. Dream had told Tubbo what was happening which meant Dream knew Tommy was here and was angry about it. Because the admin would have always been angry, no matter if it had been Tommy’s fault.

Suddenly, he kind of wanted Xisuma back. Xisuma who would not hit or hurt him for running away. Xisuma who had never made terror go down his spine, not like this.

Tommy wasn’t fucking ready. This wasn’t fair.

“Were you followed?” Fundy hissed, ears pinning back as he looked wildly around. Tubbo looked confused, following their gaze. Tommy couldn’t move.

“He said you wouldn’t be punished.” Tubbo said slowly. But there was an edge to his voice that said even Tubbo didn’t quite believe Dream was being honest about that. Tommy let out a shuddering breath, unable to move. Locked in place, staring at his best friend.

A soft crunch of grass beneath boots.

Tommy wished he was still in hermitcraft.

“Long time no see.” There was a flicker of lime green. “Last I checked, you were meant to be in exile.”

“Fuck you.” Tommy said, the breath rasping against his suddenly dry throat. He tenses as Dream steps forward but Fundy beats him to the punch. The fox hybrid skitters in between Dream and the boys. The code screens flickered around his paws, threat and worry at the same time.

Dream’s eyes dropped to the screens. “Those are outlawed in my server.” Impossibly light but they can all hear the biting threat in it. Fundy would get in major trouble for having those hacks.

If not executed.

“I don’t think that matters much here.” Fundy said, wars still pinned back. “Leave us alone.”

“Why should I? After all, here’s the exiled prisoner who was meant to stay in exile. I have a right to escort him back to exile.” Dream said. Tommy’s pants, feeling like the world is pressing in on him.

He wants to fight. He hates Dream with every fiber of his being. But something still locks him up, that uncertainty of maybe a friend and not a friend but still so very able to hurt him.

And it would be so easy for Tubbo and Fundy to turn on him here. Still weakened from crossing servers even as he fought to hide the tremble.

“That doesn’t matter.” Tubbo said and Tommy looks down at him. Tubbo meets his eyes for a moment before nodding. “The exile was only for L’Manburg, he was never exiled from any other lands and you can’t enforce that or escort him anywhere. And even so...”

The next part comes out crystal clear.

“As president of L’Manburg, I revoke Tommy’s exile.”

Tommy wheezed. “You mean it?” He whispers. “I can go home?” Tubbo nods, eyes glinting slightly with wetness.

He can go home. Back to a home that was little and torn apart and kind of weird (and not Hermitcraft and their admittedly poisonous kindness) but it was his home all the same.

“Oh.” Dream said, tilting his head to the side. “We’ve gone a bit beyond that I’m afraid.”

“What do you mean? It’s just the exile thing, right?” Fundy said, his voice going a bit shrill.

“It was that. And I’d even be willing to overlook Tommy leaving his deserved exile.” Completely ignoring Tubbo’s words that Tommy had been in Exile, not prison. “But

Tommy's broken yet another rule and this can't go overlooked."

"What do you mean?" Tubbo said, glancing at Tommy. "But you told me- he only just joined the server."

"You can just swan in and say I broke a fucking rule." Tommy snarls. The glitch should be almost gone by now and it couldn't be what Dream was referring to.

"Actually I can. Because one of the cardinal rules of this server, the one that has yet to be broken until now." Dream pauses for effect like the dramatic bitch he is. "No one goes to the End. And nothing leaves it."

Tommy knows instantly what Dream means, sees Fundy and Tubbo glance at wings, horns, tails, everything from his manifestation.

"That's not the same thing." Tommy snarls. This was a manifestation. "I didn't go to the End, I just manifested as a creature from there."

"You broke the rules Tommy." Dream said, poisonously sweet. "You know what happens next."

Put your stuff in a hole, Tommy. Be better Tommy. Why do you make me do this to you Tommy?

And suddenly Fundy's screaming, high and shrill as Dream buries an arrow in his shoulder, making him stagger back. Vivid green trickles out from around his paw.

Tubbo pushed Tommy away, trying to get in front of him. Dream shoved him away without even looking, reaching forward-

Tommy tears up, ready to bite but Dream- Dream freezes. Staring at a sudden glowing screen in front of him.

"Which one of you did this." He said, all faked kindness disappearing.

The Admin Council will be conducting an investigation of this server. Please stand by for entry.

Chapter End Notes

Huh, I wonder who did that....

Confrontation

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Canon typical violence, brief panic attack

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo grabs Tommy's hand, slowly backing away. Stay quiet." He whispers. There is fear behind it, that hushes it. Tommy had only ever heard Tubbo speak like that before, twice.

Once on the evening they declared civil war and Dream's forces began to attack them for real. Hashed and afraid that Dream would find him and their friends and kill them because what should have been fun had become something bloody and cruel.

And the second, the moments after he respawned from the box. Tommy had been quick on his feet and by the time Technoblade and Wilbur arrived, Tubbo had put on the mask that seemed to be everyday wearing now.

But Tommy had heard it.

And he heard again here. Tubbo's eyes stayed on Dream who hadn't shown any sign of hearing them. The man stared down at the notice in front of him, the same notice that had dissolved when Tubbo and Tommy began to move.

Tommy snarled. "We can fight him." He whispered. "I'm tired of running away!"

He wasn't healthy but weeks of potions and rest had made him stronger than in exile. He had no blades but Tubbo and Fundy would. If they moved quick, they could have this wrapped up before the admin council moved in and they could kick the bastards right out.

He tried to step forward but Tubbo's grip was stronger. Tommy's breath came quick and fast, the back of his mind spinning to betrayal. Of hands on him when he didn't want them. "Let go of me." He hissed, and for a moment, he thought Tubbo wouldn't.

But he did. Tubbo released him but his eyes were still wide with panic. "There's a delay." He whispered. Tommy stared at him in confusion. "The server entry delay."

Yeah, he knew about it. Most people did. Joining a server wasn't instantaneous. It took time for the coding to transfer and assimilate. Longer if the world was loaded in specialized coding and mods. But even for a small simple server, it could be as long as ten minutes.

It was a safeguard. Too quick, and coding could corrupt, or two people's coding would get loaded and the same time and bad shit would happen. Some people ran testing, back in 2b2t. Snatched up any poor bastard they could get their hands on and kicked them to the same

server at the same time, trying to force stop the safeguard and figure out a way to crack down the entry time.

It was the only thing that the admins ever dealt with. Those people usually got wiped out, but still. Testing centers kept going by whatever moron thought it was a good idea.

“So?” Tommy said. He wasn’t hearing any downside to this. More time to fight Dream now and kick them straight out. He had a sneaking suspicion who called the admin council.

“Do you really think we can take him? Right now? When he has nothing to lose and everything to gain.” Tubbo’s face twisted even as he set his hooves into the soil, trying to drag Tommy even further back as if he could with his mind. “Tommy, we’re witnesses. And Dream knows it.”

“If they kill us.” Fundy says slowly. “He’ll still be convicted.”

“Yes, but slower and harder.” Tubbo said, eyes darting. Looking for escape. “Schlatt told me about it. He had a business partner who did that, wiped out an entire company of players and tried to glitch their coding out of existence. It got traced back to him eventually but Dream? Dream would try it. He can spin a story.”

And damnit, Tommy... hesitated. Dream was cursing now, his own code screens beginning to flicker now

“We could kill him now.” He whispered.

Maybe the hermits were telling the truth and the admin council really would handle Dream. They’d set the world back to the way it used to be and strip away the once kind admin who had become the tyrant of the server.

But maybe they wouldn’t, and that’s what kept Tommy staring at Dream and wishing he had more than claws and teeth to cut him with. The admins on 2b2t never got punished, even SMP Earth admins had thrown their weight around and never got punished for it.

Dream could walk away from here free. Prime, maybe the bitch would try to push him back to exile again.

“One of us would die here. Dream’s an admin. Even Business Bay died when they fought an admin.” Tubbo wanted. That was true. It was luck alone that none of them had been on finite lives then. Lucky shots, cheating-

Tommy wanted Dream dead. He wanted Dream to suffer, to rue the day he had decided to declare war. To be the one who ended this bloody cycle and know that it could never ever begin again.

To know that he had finally won. That the green cloak and mask would never steal away his friends and his happiness again. To put Wilbur to rest finally, even if the other would have been too mad to know by the end.

But Tommy’s... kind of tired.

Hermitcraft made him stronger but it made him more... cautious as well. More craving of peace and happiness. Of no more fighting, fighting that more like pranks than bloody war.

He had fought his way back to kill Dream but also for his friends. To see L'Manburg again.

Dream has killed him twice, once in a trap and once in a duel. And while those scars are long healed, he can almost feel them ache. And he looks at Tubbo, one life left and Fundy with his bare two and all he can think about is not wanting to lose them.

And what if they weren't here for Dream? Fundy had done what was fair and right. His nephew had brought him home. But they had to hack into Hermitcraft to do it and that technically made him a criminal. At least one that could be charged with something. If they stayed at the scene of the crime that made getting caught easier and harder to push blame onto Dream because if any fucker deserved punishment, he did.

He wasn't going to see his nephew die for him and Dream walk free. He was tired of that happening, over and over and over.

If they ran, right now, that's give them more time. He didn't know much about the admin council but they'd probably go to the admin first? By then, they could be far away, equipped, and ready to take down any smarmy jerks. And they had options now. Tommy had witnessed a forced glitch out of the server once, he was 90% certain he could inflict it on someone else.

"Fine." He said. And he saw Tubbo's eyes flicker briefly in surprise, rude, but the other took quick advantage of it.

"Then fucking run." Fundy wheezed, bolting into the trees. Tommy grabbed Tubbo by the hand and sprinted after him, taking out the leftover Ender pearls and handing half to Tubbo as they ran.

"When do you think he'll--"

A scream of pure rage, like the howl of a wolf denied prey, rips through the forest. Or, Tommy thought, like a wither being summoned to this world to kill.

"I think he noticed!" Tubbo screamed, and they bolted through the woods like foxes with hounds on their heels. Tommy wheezed slightly, letting go of Tubbo as soon as he realized his wings were dragging him back slightly.

Tubbo nearly stumbled, turning back to him. But Tommy was already in motion, throwing an Ender Pearl. Refusing to give him a moment to speak, knowing the other would try to push past it.

He knew Tubbo.

To the side, he could see flashes of orange through the trees as Fundy ran. They would be fine. Hopefully.

Tommy focused forwards. Through the trees, he could see more and more light shining ahead. The trees began to thin out. That was fucking terrible honestly, poor choice by the

landscape. It was hard to run when you had no cover.

Should they find a cave? It was risky and they would be boxed in if Dream found them, but it could give them useful cover.

But his skin crawled at the thought. Caves were small. But the nest was small too, he argued with the stupid lizard brain. Caves were not nests, they were scary, his lizard brain insisted. And then he had the memory of the trap flash into his head and his skin crawled again.

No caves.

Right. Tommy threw his next Pearl to the side, heading off through the trees instead of out in the open. He'd just need to get a bit of distance and he was golden. He was the sprinting master- nothing could catch up to him-

Searing pain erupted on his back and Tommy yelped as he was thrown to the ground, choking as all the air suddenly fled his lungs in one agonizing burst. His body did the stupid thing where it seized up with pain for a moment and he gasped for air.

His wings. Someone- no not someone, he knew who it had to be, was standing on his wings. Crushing them to his back and the cold surface of the dirt blocks.

Stupid tree parkouring bitch.

Tommy dug his claws into the dirt and tried to push himself up. But just as he did, cold netherite kissed the side of his neck. "Try it." Dream snarled. The words more animal than human.

Dream was mad. Dream was very very mad.

Despite how his brain screamed, Tommy went limp. Fucking exile. When Dream got mad it was easier to just take it. He could. And Dream got worse if all the stuff didn't go in the hole.

"Do you know." Dream said. "How much trouble you just caused me?"

"Fuck you." Tommy hissed. It turned agonized as Dream shifted his weight, putting more pressure on his delicate wings. The bones creaked in warning and Tommy hissed again, a desperate warning to get up.

"It took me months to weave this server out of nothing. To put together all the rules that would make it perfect." Dream said. "I gave you a world. And as thanks, you decided to bring in a bunch of bureaucrats?"

"I don't need to thank you for being an asshole." Tommy forced out. Dream didn't get to have brownie points because he made the world. That was like a little kid taking their shovel and saying they were going home because no one appreciated their sandcastle.

"Really? Despite everything I've done for you." Dream said. He shifted again. "Most admins would have killed you for what you did. I exiled you, I tried to teach you the rules, and you threw it back into my face!"

Tommy let out a quiet sound, coughing slightly. He could get enough momentum to push up or roll. Everytime he shifted, his wings screamed with pain or his neck began to bleed.

He checked his inventory, eyes widening. No Ender pearls. Did Dream delete his inventory?

“The admin council! The goddamn admin council!” Dream said. He wasn’t even talking to Tommy anymore, he realized. This was a rant, pure and simple. Prime, he fucking hated rants. “When the fuck did you get your hands on their report code?”

“Maybe you should just get good.” Tommy mumbled. How the fuck would he know how to contact the admin council? He didn’t want them here anyways. But he sure wasn’t going to tell Dream that.

“Just a month away and already you’ve forgotten everything I’ve taught you. You break the rule of the End, you report me despite everything I’m done, and then you try to pretend you’re not the bad guy here.” Dream said. Tommy flinched. “Don’t you see what you’re doing here?”

“I didn’t break the rule of the End in the first place. I’m just a fucking hybrid. And you code locked me.” Tommy said, picking the first to argue with. He wasn’t even sure how to argue with that last bit but he’d figure it out.

Dream laughed, a cruel and shrill sound. “You think I code locked you?” He said. “Me? Is that why you’re throwing this little pointless tantrum?”

Tommy’s heart stopped in his chest.

“You said-“

“Tommy, that code lock was there long before you came here. I didn’t have anything to do with it.” Dream said. He laughed again. “So much for that loving family you dragged into war.”

He was lying. He had to be. There was- Philza and Wilbur wouldn’t have done that. Would they? He didn’t know. He actually, honest to Prime, didn’t know. Before the hermits, he would have shaken his head.

It had been so easy for them to turn on them. He had blown up Hermitcraft and Xisuma had never even struck him. Ran away from Grian and all he did was pin him. They were what Sleepy Boys used to be but suddenly weren’t anymore.

And there was the smug tone in Dream’s voice that usually meant the man was using the truth like a nail, driving in to cause pain at the deepest point.

“Get off.” Tommy mumbled. He started clawing at the ground, unheeding of the weight on his back or axe to his throat. “Get off, get off, get off-“

“I’m going to do what I should have done a long time ago.” Dream said. The axe began to move and Tommy knew with absolute certainty the other would be going for his neck. “Deal with the problem.”

And Tommy screams. He wants Xisuma. He wants Grian or Doc or Stress or Cleo or Mumbo- or or Any of the hermits. He wants them to save him. He doesn't want to die here. He doesn't want to.

There was a sharp yipping sound and Dream screamed, one filled with pain this time, falling away from Tommy. Tommy scrambles to his feet without even thinking twice about it, looking up.

Fundy. The fox was balanced on top of Dream, glaring down before leaping back, just in time to avoid the ax. An arrow whistles by, forcing Dream to retreat slightly. Tubbo stood behind Fundy, bow and arrow in hand.

"You unsealed your hybrid coding." Dream said, weighing Nightmare in his hands. Tommy whoops in excitement. "That's against the rules."

That explained the yipping sound. Fundy always did that when he pounced. Tommy had forgotten about it, the special pounce ability locked away almost as soon as it manifested. They had never even figured out if Tubbo could do anything. "Fuck yeah, Fundy!" He said, throwing up his arms.

"I think we have bigger things to care about." Fundy points out, his own ax in hand. Tubbo eyes Tommy, starting to sidle towards him. "Like you backing off."

"And why should I?" Dream asks, tilting his head to the side. "Why should I back off?"

"You're outnumbered." Tubbo shoots back. He tilts his chin up, completely ignoring that they had been running earlier. "To put it plainly, you're outnumbered and running out of time. You can't take us all."

"I am your god." Dream said, and there was a crazed note to his voice that reminded Tommy of Wilbur. Tommy hissed, flexing his claws.

(The last bit of hope he had for Dream died there, he thinks. Not during exile, not when the hermits dissect his ramblings and try to convince him Dream isn't his friend. But here, looking at the friendly admin he once knew and only seeing a crazed dictator.)

"No, you're not." Tommy insists. "An admin is supposed to be friendly. Helpful. They don't kill or give out tnt or insist they're god and play with others like their toys. We're done with that and done with you."

Well, Xisuma would give the hermits tnt but only if it was for something funny or a good reason. But that was beside the point.

"If it's an admin you want." Dream said, ignoring everything else like the bitch he was. Blue screens flicker around his hands and Fundy curses. Tommy lets out an even worse stream of curses when he sees familiar commands appearing. "It's an admin, you'll get."

"Back up!" Tommy shrieks, tacking Tubbo away. Tubbo grabs him by the shoulders, using their momentum to force them into a clumsy roll. Heat washed over their skins as the

spawned in TnT blew up, Tommy squeezing his eyes shut briefly as the roar of sound washes over them.

“TnT spawning? Classless.” Tommy whispers just to hear Tubbo wheeze out a shaky laugh. They’re already scrambling apart, another yipping sound telling him Fundy is trying to buy them more time. “I mean, of all the commands? How boring.”

He knew this one command with creepers that was incredible.

“This is not going to end well.” Tubbo whispered back even with the smile on his face. Another yip but this time it’s agonized and Tommy spins in time to see Dream throw Fundy across the clearing, the fox smashing into a tree. He doesn’t get up.

Tubbo and him reach for the fallen bow at the same time only for it to dissolve before they can touch it. Tubbo spits a curse that makes even Tommy’s eyes widen, light flickering around his hands. “That’s my inventory cleared.” He said, looking up.

Tommy could almost see the smile behind the mask as Dream slowly approached. Taking his time like a knock off wolf.

“Having trouble?” He called, the ax replaced by his own bow. Tommy beaded his teeth, scrambling to his feet.

“Comm the others.” He said. He wasn’t sure how many would get here in time or even how many would come but they needed new supplies.

A sharp inhale. “Tommy, you can’t.”

“Fuck off.” Tommy said and he lunged forward, swiping with still new claws at Dream. It made sense. He was the only one with weapons left with Tubbo’s inventory deleted and Fundy half conscious and someone had to message. Besides, Dream and him clashed over and over.

It was him Dream was targeting.

Tommy barely ducked under the arrow that came flying, swatting out blindly with his claws. Hit. Dream howled with rage as bloody scratches opened along his arm, the lime green fabric of his clothes tearing.

Hissing.

Tommy threw himself away, just barely dodging the creeper that suddenly spawned. “What happened to fairness?” He sneered, seeing the glowing stream of code around Dream’s other hand.

So many rules on hybrid features and hacking, and Dream was willing to stoop this low for himself. Fucker.

“Shut up!” Dream roared. The bow flashed into an ax but this time, Tommy met him head on, ducking under the ax swing and lunging in close. His claws were sharp if he could just-

Hissing. Too close. The ax flickered, becoming a shield but Tommy couldn't get away fast enough.

The blast sent him flying, skidding as he hit the ground. He pushed himself up sluggishly, feeling blood beginning to drip down his face. In the corner of his eye, half a heart flickered.

Dream stood over him but Tommy couldn't look at him. Only at Tubbo, the other watching with horror from across the clearing, his Comm still in hand.

It was too far. Tubbo would never make it. Even if he did, he'd be likely to die for it with Dream being armed.

He ran anyway.

The ax came down.

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut, not wanting to watch his loss.

But it never came. A sharp scraping sound like metal hitting metal and sliding away. Slowly, Tommy peeked one eye open.

"I've heard a lot about you, Dream. And none of it is good."

Chapter End Notes

....wonder who that is

Reckoning

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Panic attacks, mild disassociation

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy looked up, forehead creasing.

This guy was completely new to him. Well, maybe not? There was something familiar about his cyan hair and bright blue eyes. His outfit was deceptively casual but followed the same colorful themes. But the biggest oddity is that despite the clanging noise he heard, the other wasn't wearing any armor.

2b2t? No, definitely not. And not SMP Earth either. He would remember someone so distinctive. At least, he was pretty sure that he would. So, where did he know him from?

Dream stood frozen for a moment, ax drifting down to his side. "Smajor." He said, voice tight. Tommy nearly whooped in excitement when he recognized the name, only to choke slightly.

Ow. He didn't even know he had ribs there but they sure were there.

Smajor. One of the big name admins. He was the leader of MCC. Wilbur had talked about him endlessly back when the other was still doing MCC. Known for being mischievous but fair, he had sounded like a guy Tommy could get along with.

That didn't answer why he was here though. Standing over Dream and glaring at him like he had really fucked up. Like the kind of glare Techno used when he tried to climb out of a window once.

"What." Smajor said, folding his arms. "Do you think you're doing?"

"Smajor." Dream repeated. The mask tipped down to Tommy before looking up again. Tommy scowled, weakly flipping him off. "One of my players attacked me. I was defending myself when he suddenly threw himself to the ground."

"Really." Smajor said. Tommy glared at Dream in fury, realizing what he was doing. Did he honestly expect the other to believe that Tommy was the one attacking him?

...the other probably would believe it but that's not the point!

"Yes." Dream said. "I've been having problems with him for a long time, he's the one who came up with a plan to stage a bogus claim and then attack me with the intent of discrediting

me to the council.”

“Fuck you!” Tommy wheezed out. “I didn’t make a claim about anything! You attacked me, you fucking bastard.”

“And why hasn’t this been brought up to us before?” Smajor said, glancing down at Tommy. Tommy stuck his tongue out at him. Worth it.

He had a good feeling this guy would just listen to Dream instead of getting his side of the story.

“I thought I had it well enough in hand.” And it was kind of creepy to see how Dream sank into the role. How his shoulders dipped slightly and he hunched in on himself like Wilbur would when he fought doing something he shouldn’t. “I didn’t think he’d escalate to this. I thought we had it all worked out.”

Tommy gaped at the performance. If you listened to Dream, then he was the problem.

“I’m happy to deal with any investigation of course.” Dream said, shoulders still slumped. “But as a favor, don’t give him too much trouble? He’s still young, he doesn’t mean it and I’m pretty sure I can work this out. He’s had a lot of bad influences.”

“Shut up.”

Tommy looked past both of them, meeting Tubbo’s eyes. The ram hybrid was nearly shaking with his fury. “You’re the one who attacked us!” He said, pointing a finger at Dream. “You deleted my inventory and injured Fundy so badly he fell unconscious.”

“After he had just tried to hack another server.” Dream said, skillfully dancing around Tubbo’s accusation. “With the help of you and Tommy. I felt that when he attacked me to hide his treachery, I was justified in protecting myself.”

“You attacked us first! He only attacked you because you were trying to kill Tommy!” Tubbo said. “You would have killed Tommy!”

And when he stepped forward, not to attack Dream. Tommy knew Tubbo like that, could see how his eyes fell on him and he had the briefest moment of dread remembering his days with Techno and knowing the other had fucked up.

Because even though Tubbo was going to him, Dream leapt on the chance. He took a quick step back, one hand coming up, the very picture of a stressed out individual defending an attack made by someone crazy.

They lost, Tommy thought, feeling the rage building in his stomach. He knew calling in the council wouldn’t end well.

“Tubbo, I know you’re scared.” Dream said and Tommy had never wanted to tell someone to go fuck themselves before but he was so choked on rage that he couldn’t find the words. “But you don’t have to defend Tommy.”

Tubbo made an incoherent noise of pure rage, looking like he was five second away from lunging at Dream.

“Enough.” Smajor said. He straightened up. “I think I’ve heard quite enough out of you.”

“My apologies-“

“That bitch-“

“I said, enough.” Smajor said. “Why I took this position, I’ll never know. Anyways, Dream, you’re under investigation for breaking the multiversal rules on server care by stealing a player from another server. You’ll be proceeding with me to the courtroom now.”

“Excuse me?” Dream said. Tommy cackled, joy cutting through rage at the realization that someone had seen through the bastard’s act. That somehow, some way, Smajor had known. Maybe. But whatever it was, it had Dream pissed.

“Just a thought.” Smajor said. “But next time maybe check first who reported before making your story. Because we logged no reports on your own abilities and instead one on player theft.”

“I never stole any players. They were the ones who hacked into another server!”

“As it stands.” Smajor pointed out. “You were the admin in charge, you’ve made several mistakes messing with code doing what looked to be illicit tracking attempts. And then when the player arrived, attacked them despite the fact that their status as a player from another server meant they would be subject to the laws of their home server and should be kicked for making trouble as you claim. So two rules have been broken here.”

What?

That had not been what he was expecting. Tommy stared at Smajor, not understanding what he was saying at all. Judging by how Tubbo froze, one foot still raised, he didn’t know what Smajor was talking about either.

Don’t get him wrong, he kinda knew the basics of the law Smajor was talking about. It was mostly used for competition servers and guest visits, to prevent punishments for accidental mistakes made by people whose servers had different rules.

Instead of the player being punished by the server admin, they’d be kicked and punished by their home admin, usually on the advice of the guest admin.

But player theft...

That was hardcore stuff. That was stuff that got even the worst anarchy servers in trouble. Didn’t have any rights if you joined of your own free will, but taking a player out of their server? That was some corrupt shit. Tommy only knew about it because it was one of the few banned actions 2b2t had because even they didn’t want to deal with that. Better to try to break into a server then take someone out of it.

But he couldn't understand why Smajor was bringing it up here? No one had been stolen from their home servers. The Hermitcraft incident definitely didn't count because Hermitcraft wasn't his home server?

When Dream next spoke, his words were icy cold. "I didn't steal any players nor participate in any attempts to breach other servers. All my players are registered to Dream SMP as their home server."

And the Smajor glanced down at Tommy and he felt his heart stop.

Did those fuckers...?

"One Tommyinnit is registered to Hermitcraft." Smajor said, rolling his eyes before turning back to Dream. "And yet he is here."

Tubbo made a frantic hand motion that Tommy recognized as 'what the fuck did you do?'. He shrugged back, not understanding himself. When did he become registered to Hermitcraft? He had told them multiple times that he didn't plan to stay.

Was that what Xisuma had been planning when he made that agreement? Because he sure as Nether didn't agree to any server contracts.

"It was one of my players who brought him here." Dream said smoothly, gesturing at Fundy. Throwing him under the ravager. "Not me."

"You fucker! He did it--"

Smajor smoothly interrupted Tommy like he didn't even notice the other talking. "Fundy will be facing the court on his own time. Be that as it may, as his admin, you are still culpable."

And then the friendly tone suddenly dropped, Smajor tensing as if ready to fight. "And I would like to note that Xisuma reported intrusive code attempting to track Tommy and return him to this server, marked with your signature."

"I disagree." Dream said, his voice cold as ice.

"Are you accusing Xisuma of being wrong?" Smajor said. Tommy could almost hear the pitfall in his words. "If so, you can bring it up before the council. I'm giving you the chance to come peacefully here. I'd rather not have to call in other admins and attacking me will result in an immediate revocation of your status."

"In the case of Tommyinnit, he broke into Hermitcraft and any attempts made on my part would have been to bring him back and address his actions in hacking into another server." Dream said smoothly, not even looking towards Tommy. "In the case of an unauthorized breach, the home admin is well within their rights to retrieve the player and punish them."

Hacking- it wasn't his fucking choice! He didn't want to go to Hermitcraft! He had glitched in there by mistake.

“Tommyinnit is registered to Hermitcraft and Xisuma did not report a hacking attempt, merely that he arrived to his server and joined it officially.” Tommy choked on his words. Smajor didn’t even seem to notice as he continued. “And I believe your player is correct in that authorized punishment is rather different from attempting to kill the player.”

Tommy let out a deep shuddering breath, he didn’t know he was holding. This was both good and terrible. Because on one hand, maybe just maybe, Dream was actually going to get in trouble. Maybe this fucker would finally get what was coming to him.

On the other hand, Fundy was also going to get in trouble as well for something Tommy had wanted him to do. And while he wanted Dream to be punished, he wanted to do it. He wanted to be the one to take control back and never have to worry again about Dream.

And then there was this whole Hermitcraft thing. As much as it made him feel kind of warm to have them so easily accept him, Tommy had never actually joined their server. And as warm as he was, he couldn’t forget how they lied to him.

“So be it then.” Dream said, lowering the ax. Tubbo scrambled past, ignoring Smajor’s look as he settled near Tommy.

“Are you okay?” He whispered, hands carefully dancing over his sides. Tubbo kept an eye on Dream and Smajor, untrusting.

“Hurts like the time I set off the tnt in a desert temple.” Tommy admitted quietly. He had bones hurting that he didn’t even know he had. His back was one big bruise and his wings screamed with pain when he tried to sit up. “But I don’t think anything’s broken.”

At least, he assumed it would hurt a lot worse if something was broken.

Tubbo slumped a little with relief, leaning in closer like he was checking Tommy’s head. “There’s more of them in the forest.” He whispered. “We can’t try to retreat with Fundy. I’m sorry.”

Oh, he had to be fucking kidding him.

He couldn’t really look too much but now that he was looking, he could see patches of shadow that didn’t look quite right. Smajor wasn’t taking any chances.

Could he take an admin? Part of him screamed yes. He had taken down one admin before. But another part, the part who was wincing over the pain echoing through him, said probably not.

“Fuck this shit.” Tommy grumbled. He let his head flop back, glaring at Dream. He just wanted to go back to his server but noooo, everyone had to make it complicated. “I hope you die.”

He was proud that he didn’t flinch when that cold mask looked at him. All pretense had dropped. There was none of the friendly (no, not friendly, never friendly) Dream he had seen

in exile. The one who had spent time with him and claimed that he was his only friend. He didn't think that Dream had ever really existed.

And didn't that sting, that he had fallen for it like a pathetic dog begging for affection.

"It's time to go." Smajor said, turning away. "The council is expecting you."

Tommy caught it first, months of alone time showing him the warning signs, screaming at him. He forced himself up from the ground, shoving himself over the surprised Tubbo.

"In for a penny, in for a pound I suppose." Dream said. Nightmare flickered, disappeared, and he knew that bow. Tommy ignored Tubbo's screams, wrestling him down. He knew what Dream was aiming for but by prime, it would not be Tubbo dying today. He wouldn't allow it. Tommy looked at certain death for Tubbo and said no not today.

There was a snapping, gurgling sound.

"He said any harm done would result in an immediate revocation of your status." Tommy froze. He recognized that voice. He peeked, eyes widening when he saw Xisuma.

How did he... why?

Xisuma had one hand around Dream's neck, effortlessly lifting him off the ground. Dream wheezed laughter, hands coming up to claw at Xisuma's arm. "He said to him." Dream pointed out. "Didn't say anything about the brat."

"That's not what I meant and you know it." Smajor said icily. He looked down at Tommy and Tubbo. "You alright?"

"Fine, no thanks to you." Tommy said, but he could look away from Xisuma. Why had they followed him? Were they mad?

"He's just trouble." Dream continued and Tommy flinched a bit. "I don't know what you see in him but I'm promising that he's just tricking you. I thought the same way, that he is a good kid. But that's fake, he's a little monster. He lives off of fear and mayhem and he ruins every server he comes into contact with. No one wants to be around him, not when they realize what he's really like and for good reason. I'm doing you a favor."

Distantly, Tommy could feel Tubbo tugging on him, whispering words in his ear. But he couldn't focus. He couldn't focus on anything at all.

Because here was Dream stripping bare all the intrusive little thoughts that lived in the back of his head.

And Xisuma wasn't moving. Xisuma was just standing there, letting Dream talk.

"He steals everything and destroys things and never wants to take responsibility for any of it. He screams when things won't go his way. Did he ever tell you why I had him exiled? He burned down another player's house and then tried to blackmail me out of punishing him."

He didn't burn down George's house, Tommy wanted to say. It was just a few blocks that George fixed in an hour. And the Spirit thing had been a shitty idea but it wasn't that bad...

Right?

"He'll ruin--"

"Shush." Xisuma said and there was a crackling sound as he tightened his grip. "I'm tired of hearing you rattle on."

"It's clear that you have some sort of grudge against Tommy and you would come up with any reason to justify it. But you can't. Tommy is under my protection as one of my players. It matters not to me what he did in your server. In my server, he took nothing, destroyed nothing, and the worst trouble he gave us was an inability to sit still for medical treatment, something your server taught him."

"What?" Tommy croaked, not sure what to say. He shrank back slightly as Xisuma's gaze rested on him, almost able to feel it through the darkened glass of Xisuma's mask.

"He's one of the hermits now." Xisuma said, a bit quieter now. "And I will make sure that any threats are swiftly eliminated."

"What?" Dream croaked. And shockingly, Tommy realized he could hear fear in it. True fear.

Xisuma ignored him. "Smajor. As one of the council members, I believe you can recognize my right of recompense and the need for me and mine to defend my players?" He said.

"There is prior--"

"Yeah, prior cases." Smajor said, reaching up to rub at his forehead and ignoring Dream's spluttered protests. "Trust me, I know. But yes, in this case I believe you're right. Something has gone rotten in this server and Dream has proven beyond a doubt to be guilty and a repeat offender. But individual player cases still need to be brought to the council."

"Prior cases." Tommy hears and with a start, he realizes it's from himself. He feels strangely hazy, unable to connect to the scene in front of him. What was going on?

"What are you trying to do?" Dream said, surveying Xisuma and Smajor. "You can't!"

"Have you." Xisuma said, the words deceptively calm. "Ever heard of a server called Yandere High School?"

Judging by the choking but lack of words, Dream hadn't. Xisuma continued, soft but no less firm. "That was I and one of my players." He said, almost conversational. "Though I confess, I did the most of it, they still being sensitive over their history."

Tommy reeled back as Smajor knelt in front of them, blocking his gaze. "What's going on?" Tubbo whispered.

"Justice."

It didn't block out the screaming.

Tommy surged forward, nervous energy telling him to attack first but the sound of shattering glass hit him, two weakness potions hitting first. Tommy slumped to the ground with a wheeze.

Another sound of shattering. Blackness crept on the edge of his vision. Tommy blinked hard, brief snatches drifting past.

Grian, wings open, glowing eyes surrounding him.

Scar, his eyes blue and glowing, mist seeping from his mouth.

Doc- Mumbo- Others but the time between blinks was getting longer and longer as Tommy sunk into the ground.

His last sight was of Zedaph leaning over him with a smile that had far too many teeth.

Chapter End Notes

Congrats to the comments that guessed Scott! Technically you were all right in the end but I'm still impressed.

Not an Update

Hey guys! As you may be able to tell, this isn't an update. I'm sure many if not most of you have seen the news already.

While I don't think Technoblade was the first YouTuber I ever watched from Dream SMP, he was certainly the most memorable. The Potato War videos were incredible and I cherished watching them. I loved his humor and his love for the game. So, hearing this news... it stung. A lot. My heart goes out to his family and friends. I hope they're okay, or at least in a place where they can someday be okay.

Next week, all my fics won't be updated. I'll be taking a hiatus for that week. I'm hoping to continue writing for this fandom but right now, writing SBI feels... off. Wrong. I need a break.

Fuck cancer.

Interlude

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Mild infantilism, some violence

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Xisuma really wished he could say he was surprised. And yet, some part of him knew this was coming, even before Tommy dissolved into code in his arms. Tommy had a wild look in his eyes that was out of character for the young player.

This wasn't the first time a new hermit had panicked. It was normal actually. Coming from bad situations, most had never had such attention or kindness before. And despite his and the others' best efforts, most times, they tried to flee. That didn't mean he enjoyed it though.

However, this was surprisingly well conducted. Xisuma had been foolishly lax on Tommy's security, focusing on the outside threat of the tracker. He hadn't considered another one, one who possibly had a more direct connection to one of the hermits. The code had a certain feel that meant someone had used a back door into his server.

A bit of tnt, and they'd have to figure out where he got that from, and Tommy had hopped servers. Which was going to be rather a problem.

He let his arms drop with a quiet sigh, surveying the shopping district. Tommy had left rather a lot of craters in his wake. And more devastation than that.

Etho lunged forward, catching Grian as the other screeched, coding beginning to warp. The redstoner forced Grian down to the ground, whispering to him quietly. Iskall winced as he approached Xisuma, shaking his head.

"Sorry about that." He said. "I really didn't think- he was doing so well."

"It's not your fault." Xisuma assured him quickly. "I know you had the best of intentions. I've been watching, I know you've been working with him."

And what progress Tommy had made! He was allowing them to touch him more, accepting the gentle comfort. He was leaning into his instincts more, much to the delight of False and Zedaph. They had even managed to get him onto good food and start chipping away at his malnutrition problem.

A few more weeks and Xisuma had been certain he would have been fully socialized to the other members. Tommy would have liked Mumbo's base, he was certain of that. Perhaps if the progress had continued as it was, Tommy could have built his own part time base by one of the hermit's build sites during the next session.

Unfortunately, that would be out of the question for now. Tommy needed a much closer eye than he had hoped.

“It’s understandable.” Xisuma said, raising his voice to be heard over Grian’s screeching. Etho had pinned him now, forcing his wings down. “That we’d see a setback as optimistic as we were.”

He’d still be investigating but he had a good idea where the setback may have started. Evil X had been threatening to cause problems lately. He had no doubt the other would have tried dripping poison into the newest hermit’s ear.

Tommy was young and so so vulnerable to that. Xisuma could see the signs as clear as day. Someone had stripped much of the life out of the boy, breaking him down slowly. His trust in other players and his own admin to help him was near nonexistent, threaded with the same war torn paranoia he had seen too many times before.

He and the hermits had started healing the cracks, piecing them together with love and affirmation but there was still room for poison to get through.

That would be dealt with.

What he was more concerned about was the fact that someone had continued the charade and assisted Tommy in leaving the server. Tommy knew, even if he didn’t show it, that Hermitcraft was the best place for him. Whoever had hacked him out had reinforced some very bad ideas. And he didn’t like the idea of Tommy, still so vulnerable, being left with them.

“Now what then? I can call Joe over and once Grian calms, we can teleport him back.” Iskall said, calling his Comm to his hand. “It won’t be too hard, he’s registered and I have his Comm.”

“That won’t be necessary. I have a different plan in mind.” Xisuma said, tilting his head back. “How far are we in the approval process?”

He had known Tommy’s home server for weeks, even before he had coaxed the other into giving him the information that confirmed it. And what a sweet victory that was.

Dream SMP. A relatively new server compared to Hermitcraft or the other large servers. But what it lacked in age, it made up for with a hushed reputation. A server ran by the legendary Dream and most of the players who had joined had been pretty popular in their fields.

Hushed was the key word. On a surface level search, Xisuma found that the server was exceedingly well hidden and locked down tighter than a prison. No one had reported any contact from players who had joined.

It took some threatening and sifting through the void, but finally he found some of the server directory. And one Tommyinnit, who matched perfectly to the player who had crashed into his server.

From there, it had been an easy enough task of tracing the bits of Tommy's code that had lingered in his wake, all leading back to the server, glitch code still flickering around the firewalls. That, along with his injuries told a chilling story.

Something had forced him out. And even before Tommy had awoken and his suspicions were confirmed, Xisuma had known he would never let the younger player go.

Iskall grimaced. "Not as far as I want to." He seethed. "The council wants more evidence."

Xisuma sighed, letting the air filter out of his mask. Aggravating. They didn't need the approval of the council to get vengeance on Tommy's behalf. In fact, there was nothing the council could do to stop them.

Anyone who had tried before quickly learned that Xisuma was merciless when it came to dangers to his servers.

But he had learned that doing things through more official channels made it far far easier. For one, no one would try to resurrect the code he consigned to the deepest level of the void. He had to return a few players to the torment of the void before the admin council got the message that they were not to be brought back.

But that took time, time he would rather spend on ensuring the safety and healing of his newest charge.

"What are you thinking?" Iskall asked, picking up quickly on Xisuma's pensive mood.

"Emergency approval."

"What- ohh." Iskall said, catching on immediately. A hint of viciousness swirled in his eyes and Xisuma reached out, catching his shoulder. A silent comfort, I am here.

"We've done it before." Xisuma said, glancing at Grian. "In cases where admins attempted to continue their abuse."

"It's a cut and dry kidnapping. Tommy's registered now, even if he was talked into giving permission, they hacked him out of the server. If we pair that with the trackers, the council won't be able to argue and we'll be able to exact our own punishment." Iskall said, fingers tapping a quick beat into his Comm. "But, is this safe for Tommy?"

"It will be." Xisuma said. He could see the flickering lines of code when he closed his eyes, bright red hearts standing out like beacons against the black. "The moment his health dips, I'll go there myself, council or no council."

"I know, but-" Iskall hesitated. Xisuma zeroed in on it, stepping closer.

"Tell me." He said. Iskall hesitated and Xisuma forced him to look at him. His tone softened. "What is going on, Iskall? I can't help you if I don't know what's going on inside your head."

"I think I know who hacked Tommy out of the server. And it might be my fault they got away with it." Iskall said gruffly, wincing slightly. Xisuma kept him from looking down at the

Comm.

That was unexpected but he fell back on old habits. Iskall was fragile right now, he needed to be supportive. A solid guide as to what Iskall should do next.

“I won’t punish you for that.” He assured softly and Iskall relaxed. They’d need to work through that later, Xisuma didn’t want any of his players being too scared to talk to him. “But I do need to know the information you have. It could really help Tommy.”

“I- he’s not a bad guy.” Iskall said, slumping slightly. “A bit annoying, yeah, but he’s enthusiastic about redstone and coding and he was good to talk to sometimes before I entered the server officially so I kept in touch occasionally by Comm. And I’m pretty sure he knew Tommy because he mentioned having an uncle named Tommy who went missing.”

A Comm channel. Difficult to hack but the downside was that it gave people a direct line into his server. It was why Xisuma had been so strict about locking down comms, particularly those of new players. It was just too risky.

“And their name?” Xisuma prompted. Whoever it was would need to be handled. He wouldn’t allow anyone to keep a back door into his server.

“Fundy. His name is Fundy. And I’m pretty sure he’ll be on the Dream SMP too.” That confirmation made things much faster. Xisuma had been near certain they were, but this meant he could knock out all the risks in one fell swoop. “Some of the stuff he says matches.”

“Thank you for letting me know.” Xisuma said gently. Iskall took a deep breath and nodded. “I’ll meet with you later and we can go over if you know anything that might help before we leave.”

“Yeah.” Iskall said, glancing down at his Comm. They’ll need more than one session then, Xisuma could spot guilt from a mile away. “Yeah, I’ll meet with you and give you everything I know.”

“I’m going.” Grian said, folding his arms and glaring. He didn’t know whose idea it was to let a fledgeling go off on their own back to their server that abused them, but he 100% didn’t agree.

Even just thinking about it made his feathers ruffle and the temperature around him to drop.

“It was the logical decision.” Mumbo reminded him, one arm still around his shoulders.

“That doesn’t matter!”

“We had to do the same thing with you.” Cub observed, looking up from a gadget that had far too much tnt to be safe. Or sane. “I distinctly remember-“

“Oh, shush! That was different!” Grian shot back. “For one, I was a fully grown adult! And I had the power to defend myself by then!”

Being a Watcher did have some perks after all.

Even if 95% of those perks were ripping apart your childhood abuser while laughing maniacally and burning their coding so badly, it would take a miracle to piece it back together enough to force a respawning.

“You hadn’t grown into everything when that happened either.” Mumbo said, sending a significant glance towards his wings. Grian flushed slightly.

“That’s different.” Grian huffed. Tommy was the youngest member they had ever had and terrifyingly fragile. And worse, he had just gone through his manifestation!

He should be in a nest right now! Not gallivanting off in a server that had tortured him!

Grian had plans! Good ones, where he was going to shred that stupid server and its even stupider admin to shreds. Watch them, drive them crazy, and watch them spiral as they get to feel the guilt weigh heavy on their shoulders. And then the finishing blow where he tore apart their world in front of them and ground their failures into a weapon to tear them apart.

And then he’d come home and find Tommy in his nest and tell him that he would never have to worry again. That he was going to be safe and be able to relax and be a person again and not a soldier.

“I’m just looking forward to eating people.” False informed him because she was a Killjoy who just ate people and worlds when she was feeling hungry enough. Zedaph nodded emphatically next to her.

“I feel like you’re being a little too easy going about this.” Grian hissed. Mumbo stiffened and Scar nearly tripped over himself scrambling back to force Grian to sit. Grian hissed at him too, accepting it.

It felt nice but he was still mad!

“Be polite or you’re going to your nest and staying there.” Cub said, raising an eyebrow. “There’s no reason to lash out at us.”

“Fine.” Grian grumbled. “I’m sorry.”

“Trust me.” Zedaph said, his grin sharp as knives. False ground her ax against the whetstone, making sure it was even sharper despite it already having the gleam of high level sharpness enchantments. “We’re definitely very concerned.”

“A little bit of conquest can be a very good bonding experience for a young dragon.” False remarked. “A good demonstration of hunting skill too. Important for establishing firm bonds.”

“I won the rock-paper-scissors.” Grian said sulkily. He had the right to go psychologically torment the admin! He won it fair, well, not fair at all. But with a minimum amount of cheating! “But I still don’t think this is a good idea.”

And when everyone else cheated too, he was pretty sure that cancelled out his cheating.

“Well, you did say to do what it takes to bring Tommy home safe. The moment anything happens to him, Xisuma will bring him right back.” Mumbo reminded him. “It’ll be as easy as slicing a cake because he’s rightfully registered here.”

And because Xisuma was willing to shred any code beyond repair that stood between him and Tommy but that really went without saying.

“Yeah! And consider, Tommy will be so much happier when we bring him back. I mean, think about it! He’ll finally realize we have a point about how much safer it is here!” Scar cheered, leaning on his other side. “And, really, did you think that we would all skip out on an opportunity to rip that server to shreds?”

“It’s technically mine.” Grian grumbled. But he tilted his head back, indicating Scar had won this round.

“You’ll get your turn.” Xisuma promised, walking back into the room. He was unaffected by the laser like focus that settled on him, glowing code still surrounding his hands.

“Well?” Doc promoted. “Are we getting the emergency permission?”

Unsaid was that this was a formality at best. They’d be going anyway.

“In a way.” Grian snorted at seeing who stepped out from behind Xisuma. Scott Smajor himself. The other admin’s composure slipped for a brief minute when he saw the room, but the icy mask quickly slipped back.

Impressive. Grian didn’t know many people who could face down a room of monsters, horrors, and things that went bump in the night.

Also moronic because the other didn’t even have a sword and Zedaph was this close to starting to eat anyone who wasn’t a hermit.

“How so?” Scar hummed, his eyes glowing blue and a smirk twisting his face. “Are you suggesting that we don’t, in fact, have it?”

“Due to the incident of last time-“ Grian winced and Mumbo’s side hug got tighter. “And the fact that the player in question is a minor, I’ll be going with you to call Dream before the Admin Council.”

“He’ll never make it there alive.” Cleo said. They had told Tommy they would put Dream before the council but none of them meant it. Tommy wasn’t quite in the right frame of mind at the time to understand that since he could not play judge, jury, and executioner, they would do it for him.

Grian sympathized. He had hesitated when Xisuma had told him, some distant part insisting that this was too much. But now, he understood.

“We must insist that the process is at least attempted. I’ll be providing the summons to Dream based on the complaint Xisuma has lodged.” Scott said. But he hesitated, cold blue eyes narrowing. “You- will be allowed to wait outside the server in order to monitor your player.”

Grian hissed, and Scott couldn’t suppress his flinch as the world flickered around Grian, more of himself shifting into view than he normally showed. He was going to tear them to shreds, keeping him from his fledgling-

“Dream played in MCC, didn’t he?” Scar said, his tone deceptively light. All eyes went to him, drawn by interest or the persistent tug of magic. “It would be terrible if he was exonerated and allowed to play again. After all, would the audience listen to a ban if all you can point out is a failed investigation?”

Scott froze. Scar went in for the kill.

“I heard you’ve been talking to some of your own SMP members about playing in MCC. I’m sure they’ll be interested in going up against the legendary Dream.”

Grian sniggered, some of the eyes closing. Oh, that was cruel. Technically the crew could ban anyone they wanted from MCC for any reason but now the idea was in Scott’s head. Due process was due process, but everyone knew Dream was guilty and Scott would never allow his friends or games to become twisted by him now.

His sigh sounded like the cracking of a glacier. “Well, I can’t allow you to kill him right away.” He said. Someone, probably Doc, hissed. “But, if you’re willing to hide, I will let you into the server.”

“And if anything happens, we’ll take care of the situation.” Xisuma promised. Scott looked like he wanted to argue but immediately thought better of it.

“I can’t promise anything.” Scott said with a shrug. But Grian let a lazy smirk cross his face, leaning into Scar. They had already won.

Victory would be sweet.

The world tore and twisted around them, screaming at the burning rents torn into its code. Fire flickered in the trees, smoke occasionally thinning to show massive shapes looming in the sky.

Any screams from players were drowned out by the thudding of his heartbeat. Grian let his lip curl, exposing sharp teeth as he leaned over the former admin. Their mask was shattered, exposing one terrified eye.

“You?” Dream whispered. Glowing purple reflected in his eyes as the air twisted around Grian, parrot wings becoming something more.

“Me.” Grian said, delighted. “The one who adopted that chick you abandoned. The one who has come to tear your world down around you. The one who watches.”

He leaned in closer, savoring the fear. After this, Tommy would be his, no more interlopers interfering and hurting his chick.

“But you can call me Dreamslayer.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey, so I'm back! This chapter was fun to write, I've been planning an interlude focusing on the hermit's for a while.

On hiatus updates. LBAT should be continued as scheduled. My H2O fic, When The Water Ran Red, will be starting next week. I really love the fic, but the recent events made me feel weird about writing and caused some delay in the next chapter. Don't worry, it still has Dark SBI and all the good stuff. I don't think I'll be needing any major tweaks to the plot, I just needed a bit of time off.

The Magnets Interlude

Chapter Notes

How's everyone doing back on Dream SMP?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Eret woke up that morning, she thought it would be another grey day in a series of grey days.

He wished he couldn't say it hadn't been more peaceful than it had been for a while. But for once, things had fallen into a tense equilibrium. Which was a pity because Eret so badly wanted to bleed off his energy with a fight. Fights had been a day to day occurrence before-

She shouldn't throw stones. Too many of those were being thrown around lately, glass castles crashing down as peace time forced everyone to look at themselves again. Tommy wasn't the reason for all the fighting on the server, no matter what the other players may have thought. The server was quieter now, but not in a good way.

A small dim room told Eret all they needed to know about the bloodlust within themself.

No, the peace was tense. Painful. L'Manburg was preparing for a war it could not win, its president grieving over the loss of his best friend. Dream stalked around like a wolf in the dark, alternately smug and conniving. If Eret thought the admin had been bad before, they were far worse now.

And Eret was left with nothing to do but putter around a big empty castle, waiting for someone to come visit him. Too late, he had found out that there was no true power behind the throne and forgiveness didn't come easy.

She never thought being a ruler would be so boring.

The server was holding its breath. And as bored as they were, Eret would not tip it into the war that seemed inevitable.

He never expected the world to end.

It had begun so anticlimactically. He had been replacing one of the beacons, carefully sliding the block so its glassy edges matched perfectly with the rest. Knowing any imperfection would drive him to aggravation, trying to fix it for the next hour.

Sure, they could let the code auto place the block in the perfect place. But it's not like they had anything else to do with their day.

She had just finished setting it just slowly when the ground rumbled, jerking it out of place. Eret had stumbled on his dirt block, letting go of the block and seeing it snap to its automatic placement. “What in the world?” He mumbled to himself, stepping off the block.

Eret walked to one of the windows, peering past the curtain. Clouds drifted across the sky, a soft breeze blowing leaves down the path. In the distance, he could see a small figure that could have been Quackity, gliding down from a pillar.

Eret shook his head ruefully, letting the curtain fall back in place. Well, if Quackity was willing to risk Dream’s wrath by distracting the admin and taking it as an excuse to do some gliding practice, she certainly wasn’t going to say anything.

Quackity could use the time in the air.

Eret was walking back to their throne when the ground rumbled again. And *twisted*.

For a moment, the entire ground lit up blue, coding unfurling across the surface like an ugly gash. Eret barely kept his footing, watching as the coding spread up the walls before finally disappearing.

Coding of the world. Coding that only Dream was allowed to see.

His Comm pinged. Eret reached for it, a confused frown crossing his face when he saw the message.

Due to the crimes of admin Dream, the admin council has allowed for the law of retribution to take place.

Eret felt his breath catch in his chest. Something was very very wrong. He needed to go help the others.

He didn’t know what the admin council was, but he understood retribution well enough.

He was out the door with his netherite sword when he felt his pace stumble. Where were the others? Quackity was likely around L’Manburg, he knew, but Fundy had disappeared a few days ago with a few lame excuses. Tubbo had left a few hours ago without a word, Eret only knowing that because Quackity had commed him in a panic.

Because wherever they were, he needed to find them soon.

It was even worse outside.

Coding pulsed with an eerie light in some places, warping in front of her very eyes. Whole sections being deleted away, chunks vanishing to reveal the void. An eerie darkness lit the sky. A strange grey pallor that signified a storm coming and yet all the clouds from earlier had vanished.

And yet she could hear the distant crack of thunder- no, footsteps. Because what he had thought was a hill suddenly looming up up up, opening a mouth that had far too many teeth.

Eret jumped to the side, just dodging a lunge before fleeing down the path. Primal instinct told him that he didn't have a water bucket chance in the nether facing that thing.

But where to go? Everywhere they turned, chaos was tearing the world apart. One path, the crackle of tnt filled the air but tnt didn't take our whole chunks. Down another, and she was forced to flee some piece of machinery that ate the world in front of it.

And all throughout, the monster pursued relentlessly. Eret kept one hand on his Comm, hoping desperately that Fundy and Tubbo were okay.

Pursued. Or herding. Because it was clear that monster had a choice in mind of where it wanted her to go.

A choice whose reason became quickly clear.

A chunk deleted in front of her. Eret skidded, slowing to a stop. "One way to go out then." He said to himself, hefting their sword. A good way, Wilbur would have said.

He turned, bracing himself for the hit, sword coming up to swing. There was a clang and a terrible ringing and once again, Eret was left looking up.

But this person was far more familiar. "Eret!" Foolish yelled at him. Puffy perched on his shoulder like a demented parrot. "Leave her alone."

The golden shark twisted, taking advantage of his size increase to throw the monster back. It felt back with a roar that shook the earth, eyes glowing with violet rage.

But instead of taking advantage, Foolish scooped him up, heavy metal footsteps thudding along the path.

"Do you know what's going on?" Puffy yelled at him, clinging to the shoulder. Eret shook his head mutely. If she knew what was going on, then they might know what to do about it. Alas, they had no clue whatsoever.

"That's a world eater!" Foolish yelled, his titanic voice drowning out the wind. Eret winced involuntarily. A cute misnomer, perhaps?

"Is that bad?" He yelled, almost drowned out by the wind roaring around them as Foolish ran. Even in his larger size, the other was constantly having to dodge around the world breaking apart around them.

"They were supposed to be extinct by now! For good reason!" Ah. Very likely not a cute misnomer then.

"What do we do?" Puffy said, glancing around worriedly. He could see what she was thinking. Maybe the entire server could take care of one catastrophe, if they would finally work together without arguing?

But Foolish's height was a mixed blessing. There were far more catastrophes in this world than just the world eater. In the distance, he could see flames lighting the sky, smoke

billowing from a massive forest fire. The horn of a raid blew eternal.

“Nothing.” Foolish whispered, barely audible over the wind. A sound full of grief and regret. “There’s nothing left for this world. If I had my full powers, I might be able to stop or slow it, but Dream locked most of them away as a condition for me staying.”

For a moment, Eret felt a spark of rage at the one who called himself an admin. It always came back to Dream. If it wasn’t for Dream’s rule about leaving the server, they could have fled the server. If it wasn’t for his rule about outside contact, they could have called for help.

Instead, they were trapped here, in an apocalyptic world. And the safe paths were gradually dwindling away.

And the ravager in the room was that looked to be on purpose, they were being toyed with. Everytime the monster caught up, it slowed, just slightly. Chunks disappeared before Foolish could move closer to where he could hear familiar yells. The shadows had eyes and threatened to bite.

It reminded her, vaguely, of the videos Dream used to show off. Manhunts. Except instead of being a fun game, these creatures were trying to torment them before they died for unknown reasons.

“I don’t have any ideas left.” Eret admitted bitterly. “Whoever the admin council is, they want us dead.”

Foolish came to a stop, ignoring Puffy’s abrupt words being cut off. “The admin council?” He said.

“There was a message?”

“The temple blew up with us in it and then a ninja nearly trapped us in a death machine, we haven’t checked our comms since.” Puffy admitted, sending a cautious look to a nearby pool as it began to boil,

Foolish let out a deep sigh. “I request the right for me and my compatriots to have a full trial in front of the council.” He said. “And understand server leave is necessary.”

Eret opened his mouth, ready to ask Foolish what he thought he was saying when the world suddenly snapped sideways.

It was like leaving a server if leaving was like getting dragged backwards through the nether while a zombie tried to gnaw on you.

It seemed like eternity before she could suck air back into her lungs, still wheezing slightly, but strong enough to look up again. Black. Nothing but void, and a bedrock platform holding her and her friends up. Puffy was kneeling over a smaller Foolish who was shaking with the force of their wheezing.

“Rough ride?” Eret glanced up, seeing that there was one other who joined them on the platform. They wore a long red coat, red and black shades covering their eyes. Code flickered

around their finger tips, opening a window into the void.

A window onto their server. Images flashed by, people Eret didn't know but places he certainly did, even if they were ruined.

"What's going on?" She asked, eyes stuck to the screen. "Where are we? Who are you?"

"You're in a holding zone." The other said, voice chipper. "The council isn't holding trials immediately, but considering your request, we've pulled you out due to... circumstances. I'm Captain Sparklez, an admin of the council and one of those monitoring the... situation."

"The retribution." Puffy said, her tone angry. "What even is that based on?"

"Dream unlawfully attempted to follow and steal another player, attacked them, and then attempted to circumvent judicial processes. It is what it is." Sparklez said, glancing back down at the screen. "Due to his actions, the law of retribution has been called into effect."

"His actions are not our actions!" Puffy argued, pointing at the screen that showed the community center in flames.

Sparklez opened his mouth to reply but was cut off by Foolish. "I get the feeling." He said, voice raspier than the time the shark totem forgot to drink water for two weeks, "That it is less about why the law was called into effect than who. Accused have a right to trial typically."

"Ehhh, it's a grey area really." Sparklez admitted. "But yes, in this case, we have chosen to delay trials until after retribution is finished."

"You're leaving people to die!"

"Only for like a week or so!" Sparklez said. "Once they get the majority of it out of their systems and time to cool off and focus on their own projects again, it's easy to convince them to let us have most of not all of the lesser offenders or players back. And some people's trials will be going on first, not everyone is being booted to the void."

Eret and Puffy shared identical looks of dismay. "Why can't you stop them?" Eret said. "Isn't it unfair for them to take their retribution out on an entire server? What about Fundy or Purpled or Tubbo?"

"Look, it's nothing personal." Sparklez said. "But I just watched Tango burn through netherite and then light fire to bedrock. And I'm kind of attached to my server and little things like not being seen as an accomplice."

"There's nothing." Foolish said, shaking his head. "I and Ere- I have seen the remnants of worlds after world eaters came through. I'm guessing without the formalities of requesting legal escort and holding for trial, you can't interfere much."

"Precisely." Sparklez said. He shrugged. "But if it makes you feel better, anyone who's under the age of adulthood for players won't be harmed. The hermits don't hurt kids. And there might be others who'll not be included."

That was... Purpled. Tubbo. Maybe Jack as well. But not Niki or Fundy or so many other people.

Eret looked at the screen and hoped everyone would be okay.

Philza had seen a lot of things in his life.

Including world ending apocalypses. So when the world started tearing itself apart, he nipped out the door and started heading for the location Technoblade had messaged him when the old warrior felt the coding start to tear. Philza may have decided not to, focused on his family as he was, but he still had some of the skills and had made sure every kid of his could tell. He counted his blessings that he had been wise enough to keep Wilbur's grave off server.

They'd leave. He had back doors off the server. Dream was centuries too young to challenge that part of his permissions.

But it was admittedly the first time the world had been out to get him.

Every step, blocks crumbled away. He had already had to dodge some sort of redstone contraption, time speeding up in a localized area and reducing all life inside to dust in minutes, and even a giant wolf.

A giant wolf that ate his sword! It nearly took his hat too before Phil had thrown down a speed potion and left.

But when the coding itself started to rend apart around him, Philza slowed to a stop, broken wings flaring and one hand coming up to keep his hat from falling away. He looked around cautiously.

"You gonna reveal yourself, mate?" He said. He could feel the ripples through the code. The last time he had felt something like this, his wife had come to visit his hardcore server. If he closed his eyes, he could almost see the codes glowing against the back of his eyes, locking down the area.

No escape. Better to wait it out, deal with it face to face. He wouldn't be leading this back to Technoblade.

"I suppose your expertise is one thing that wasn't exaggerated." The other answered, melting out of the shadows. Philza jerked his eyes down to the floor, unable to look at the yawning void behind the mask.

"XisumaVoid." He said. He recognized that mask, as void tinged as it was. The admin was reclusive, even more reclusive than most hardcore servers. But there was no missing the telltale signs.

It was rare to see a creature of the void these days.

"What retribution has this server earned?" Philza said, drawing himself up to his full height and allowing his wings to spread. In the distance, crows cawed.

He had a solid chance here. Xisuma may be one with the void, but Philza didn't make it this far without skills of his own. He had faced death and walked away with a kiss on his lips. He had reigned supreme in a hardcore world for years. And soon, Technoblade would be here as well.

The admin didn't move. Not to laugh, not to sigh. But the shadows grew longer. "Dream abused one of mine and attempted to take them back from their home." Xisuma said, voice as chilly as powder snow. "For every emotional and physical scar he had given them, I have delivered them onto his server."

"It won't survive."

"It was a miracle my player did." Xisuma said. He tilted his head to the side. "I would think you should be more concerned."

"And why's that?" Philza said. He couldn't resist turning his head to the side, mimicking Xisuma. The crows were keeping their distance but he could see a few doing the same.

"It was one of your sons. Tommy."

And

Philza

Froze

Distantly, he could hear himself say, "What about Tommy?"

And this time Xisuma really did laugh. Something cold and echoing. "You really did a number on yourself, didn't you?" He said. "Couldn't fly so you ripped out the part that wanted it. And the part that gave you everything else."

Philza laughed as well, the sound harsh. "It wasn't that bad, mate." He said.

It had been the right decision. The easy decision. After his wings were permanently damaged protecting Wilbur, the instinctual backlash had nearly destroyed him. He had been a useless lump for so long after it, unable to do much as move without his hindbrain screaming at him to take to the air.

Elytrians weren't meant to live after they lost their wings. If it wasn't for Techno, he would have never managed to scrape what was left of him together. In the end, locking down that part of his coding had been the only choice left.

He had done it and never once looked back. Everything got easier after that. His wings no longer weighed him down and he could actually do things again. Even better, he could do more than he had struggled with before! No more sickness when he went down into the caves.

(Even if the world had gotten colder. His grief over Wilbur less sharp. His concern for Technoblade a little less present.

...and he never once thought about his little fledgeling.)

“You never felt bad about it didn’t you.” Xisuma accused. “You were the one to lock his wings away, thinking he would one day fly without you. And then you never took it off because you were jealous.”

“I wasn’t-“ Philza spluttered. “I wasn’t jealous!”

The code block had made sense! Wilbur wasn’t ready to care for Tommy during his manifestation. And before that, he was leery of starting it so soon, of having to see Tommy in pain. It was the smarter choice, to lock it down until his little family was ready.

But then Wilbur had died and L’Manburg blew up and Tommy had left and he had-

He had never once thought about it.

Tommy had been fine. The other hadn’t even seemed to notice or even care that he never manifested. It had worked out fine. He loved him. He definitely remembered that. Tommy was.... When was the last time he visited him? Why couldn’t he remember?

“You were. You knew he would be strong and quick and bright and you wouldn’t be.” Xisuma said, ignoring Philza’s protests, that he was putting words into his mouth. “You were a petty, small minded fool who blinded yourself when your child needed your and in good conscience, I can not allow you to corrupt his healing any further.”

Philza stiffened, claws sliding out. “You gonna try and kill me, mate?” He said.

“No.” Xisuma said. “Have you ever tried putting two magnets together?”

...what?

“Why would I do that?” Philza said, making a face. He rarely visited modern servers with those kinds of coding.

“My friend Joe told me something interesting happens if you do. See, if the magnets are set up right, they’ll stick together. But if they’re opposing forces, they’ll fly apart. Nothing can make them stick together.”

“What does this have to do with me?” Philza asked. Was this some kind of hermit threat?

“I don’t want to kill you. Killing you would be far too easy and Tommy isn’t yet in a place where he could understand your death, as necessary and rewarding as it would be.” Xisuma said. “Instead, I’m going to make it so you can never see him again. Like two magnets, you will never be able to stay in the same space, room, server... you get the picture. He’ll heal. And you’ll suffer.”

“No!” Philza screeched, half fear and half long locked instincts rising to the surface. He lunged. The shadows flickered, the mocking bell like cry of a vex.

And his world shattered apart.

Chapter End Notes

Soooooooo it was actually Philza!

Basically, the old man decided to put the code block on Tommy's manifestation very early on. Half possessiveness of not wanting Tommy to possibly leave the nest too soon, half worry because manifestation, and a meh thought out concern about delaying it until the rest of SBI could commit to caring for him through his recovery at 100%.

...except then he code locked himself, messed up his instincts and therefore most of his previously caring (and possessive) personality in the bargain. Because unlike Tommy who lived without them, a Lot of things in Philza's life was connected to his instincts. Hence, Tommy lost his dad :(

Where We Go

Chapter Notes

Some more outsider perspectives! We'll be returning to Tommy next chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It had taken a long time for Bdubs to become comfortable with the sight of the void.

Not that there was anything particularly wrong with the void! In fact, there were a lot of nice things about the void! A scenic backdrop, aesthetic, the void of the nether ceiling or the End was always particularly good for setting off builds.

And he had friends from the void! Xisuma, Zedaph, even Grian could be counted as an honorary member of the void crew. And Tommy too now, though he had only seen videos of the little guy.

But there was no hiding that seeing the darkness of the void triggered something fierce inside of him. The darkness that had gotten the rest of his kind destroyed.

People feared the rest as their world was falling apart. They feared him after it had.

But that didn't mean he enjoyed it. And for the longest time, he hadn't.

Therapy with Xisuma had helped a lot! Getting dropped in the void and not dying solved a lot of fears around it!

But what really fixed it was this moment right here.

Bdubs leaned back in his viewing platform, helpfully built by Tin Foil Chef, swinging his legs back and forth as he looked at the darkness below. See, unless it was modded, the night sky of the worlds never had stars. He had seen many beautiful modded skies.

But nothing like the light against dark that happened as a world tore itself apart. Each one beautifully unique in the sparks and stars that danced their way across the black canvas before disappearing. He could almost feel the clock ticking down, echoing through the space a world once lived in.

If he squinted into the darkness, he could see the clocks connected to the scattered remnants of players. Not all of them were there. A few had chosen to enter the jurisdiction of the council, and one (or two? Yeah he was pretty sure it had been two. The bird man had gotten kicked, still screaming, and the war disciple was locked onto Hypixel. A few strings pulled, and the other was unable to leave. If he wanted war so much that he forgot his family, then he would get it. Who chose the madness of war spirits? Really? Classless.).

The satisfaction of knowing that his family was completely and utterly safe.

Bdubs slid back into himself with a tap on his shoulder, turning with a smile. “We’re almost done. Want to come see?” Etho said. “They’re just discussing the last one now.”

“Sounds good, sounds good.” Bdubs agreed, hopping to his feet. “Personally, I’d leave them all in here.”

A little darkness was a very good teacher.

“Xisuma argued well.” Etho said, guiding him back across the platform. And quite nice ones too! TFC had really outdone himself. “The Enderman hybrid will be going to the council for now, though that might be revisited later. His coding is messed up and it’s just more evidence on the scales. Xisuma’s gonna meet with them soon to talk about it.”

“Ooo, I don’t think I want to see what you would think of as messed up coding.” Bdubs teased. Etho rolled his one visible eye. “Kidding! Man, his coding must be terrible. Tommy’s was a pretty big mess.”

“We’ve got some sort of weird server mechanic-“

A roar echoed over the void. It was met with an equally fierce one, fire blooming across the void. Bdubs whistled, watching dim shapes moving through the darkness. He should join them soon, that looked like a fun fight.

“-nobody’s quite sure what that is. Joe’s theory is that the admin got so messed up the server created a primary mechanism to assist itself and the thing got sentient.”

“Not that bad of an idea.” Bdubs said. It was still dead. Stuff like that were usually imprints of the admin, the server didn’t have much to go off of. And that could not be tolerated. Still. Pity for it. But it’s not like the server really needed a mechanism like that anymore.

“And you’ve taken care of the weird temporal mistake.” Etho sound. He doesn’t react to the chiming laugh of Bdubs or the way his robes shift slightly.

He had burned that place to the foundations, draining every last moment away as it screamed. No challengers.

The Time King would remain on top.

“Doc’s already taken the kid back.” Bdubs said, nodding to himself. The creeper hybrid had played dirty, distracting the other hermits with some sort of freaky ghost thing (and wasn’t that weird! Some sort of twisted afterlife for a server? Tommy was lucky he didn’t have to live here anymore).

“Xisuma said he’ll be talking to the admin council about this.” It was a calculated risk but there were so many ways it could have gone very very wrong.

“Which leaves, drumroll please-“

“The hacker.”

Bdubs paused, giving Etho a look. “Etho? You’re ruining the moment. My moment, Etho.”

“Oh no.” Etho said. He glanced up, looking at the small crowd in front of him. “Shouldn’t he be conscious? To argue his defense?”

“Ah, who needs consciousness?” Scar said. He had one hand on the fox hybrid’s head, eyes glowing blue. “That’s overrated”

“Yeah, don’t you know that unconsciousness is the trend now?” Bdubs said.

“It shouldn’t take long enough to be necessary.” Xisuma said, arms folded behind him as he looked down at the hybrid. “On one hand, he has broken our rules and put Tommy in danger. He hacked our server and ripped a player away and put them back into an abusive situation. I can’t let this pass lightly and previous law dictates they suffer the same fate as an accomplice.”

“I know.” Iskall replied. “But with my history with him, I hesitate to condemn him to the same date as that poor excuse of an admin. Hes foolish and overconfident, but not evil.”

Bdubs perked up. “Somebody got attached.” He sing-songed. “Were you planning on sponsoring him?”

Iskall hesitated, glancing back down at the fox hybrid. “I considered it but dismissed it.” He said. “He seemed relatively stable and happy in his own server.”

Ah, so that’s how it was. Sponsoring was a tough deal. Not everyone could accidentally stumble into the perfect server to heal from the world. Sometimes the council directed them their way and sometimes one of the hermits found someone on their brief trips outside the server.

It’s not like it was a requirement... but if the fox seemed happy where they were, they probably weren’t going to do well as a hermit.

“This is why we don’t get attached outside the server.” Xisuma said with a sigh, shaking his head. “It’s risky.”

Iskall nodded mutely. They’d probably be going for a few lessons on attachments to non sponsored players and comms were going to be locked down. Again.

Ugh, he understood the need to keep the server safe but updates took sooooo long.

“Scar?” Xisuma asked. “What’s your verdict?”

“He’s got a bump on his head.” Scar said. He laughed at the looks on their faces. “Up in the air really! Now, I don’t know about what Iskall’s saying because he definitely was aware of his actions. But, I concede, he didn’t think he was doing something bad. He actually thought Tommy was in danger in our server!”

“Mhm, thinks quite a lot about it too.” Scar’s eyes were closed, betraying his split attention as he focused. Scar had always had a lighter touch than Cub, who preferred the hard hitting magic, but even he had to be careful when working in someone’s mind. “He hasn’t had much experience with admins other than his father and Dream, and both of them were quite cruel. Oh- and Tommy’s going to need monitoring. He did reach out asking for assistance leaving.”

“Oh, the early day drama! There’s always so much of it!” Bdubs said, rolling his eyes. He didn’t remember being this much of a handful when he joined the server. He was jittery around the void, yeah, but he didn’t want to leave! He knew a good thing when he saw it.

Hermitcraft had been a place of refuge and from the first day, he knew he’d be safe. Why leave back out to where there was more danger?

“Some people struggle to feel they’re safe. I’ll reach out to Keralis and Wels, see if they have any ideas for how to lock down comms further.” Xisuma said. He blurred around the edges, inky black lingering around his form.

Nothing like the adrenaline crash of post retribution! Nothing like it, Bdubs usually liked to spend it in his house, watching videos with some of the other hermits or playing pranks.

“I can handle it. You’ve got enough work and our admin has to take care of himself too.” Etho said. “Besides, it looks like we still aren’t coming to a consensus on what to do. He definitely deserves caution and retribution but the information Scar is seeing suggests it did come from a better place and he’s young enough that usually we’d avoid retribution and leave his fate to the council.”

Bdubs picked up on the thread. “Which I’m guessing we can’t do even outside the retribution.”

“He hacked my server. An easier method and with an opening, yes, but that’s not a weakness I’m willing to keep.” Xisuma said. Unsaid was that anyone who had before was buried at the deepest levels of the void.

“And it would be a poor idea to have him on the server while also maintaining Tommy’s recovery.” Iskall said reluctantly. “We’re already planning for the possibility of others too, and locking any further hacks he had and caring for both would strain even us.”

Oh, this was a tough one. Bdubs thought for a moment before proposing: “Well, he doesn’t have to stay with us, right? Or well, not at first! Iskall, you have that weird vault server, don’t you?”

“Yeah?”

“Throw him in there! We can give him some time alone to think about his decisions.” Bdubs said. “That’ll let you keep an eye on your little buddy, and we can focus on the newbies! And then when they’re at a better stage and this guy knows what he did wrong, we can revisit the issue.”

It's not something they commonly did, but Iskall and a few of the other hermits had access to the server too! So, it's not like the fox would be alone too much.

"And by that point, we'll have reached a better consensus on whether to turn him over to the admin council or punish him ourselves." Xisuma said, nodding slowly. "Iskall, your thoughts?"

"I think that'll work." Iskall said, nodding slowly. "I'll need to increase security on the server because it's a bit outdated but that'll solve our problems quite neatly."

"Then that'll be what we go with for now." Xisuma said, straightening. "I'll direct Joe your way to help with the server code and I'll be running a quick errand before visiting the council."

"Have fun! I sure am." Bdubs said. He turned to Etho. "Want to join me?"

"I've got a little time before my own errands." Etho said, eye crinkling with mirth. They turned back to the void and the distant stars that were once a world and now burning rubble. "I can do some work in the meantime."

Evil X- Honestly, he just preferred Evil at this point. So much crisper on the tongue. Evil knew he had fucked up.

Fuck, if he had known the kid was that bad at covering their tracks, he would have skipped the visit. Was all this worth a little chaos? The chance to cause some distress with his siblings when one of his new players slipped out of his 'perfect' server?

Absolutely yes, but he would have at least hid his tracks better. Xisuma was brutal towards threats, even ones that were technically his.

Evil hissed in pain as his armor cracked, systems blaring warning. It shouldn't- couldn't crack. Not in the over world where the air was breathable but felt like sandpaper against lungs that were meant for darkness so thick you could slice it. Xisuma was really angry this time.

"I think this is the biggest mess you've made in centuries." Xisuma said, mostly to themselves. Evil was trying to conserve air before he had to breath that filthy overworld stuff. "And I'm not mad. But I'm mad."

"That I told him the truth?"

"A truth that you made to hurt him as much as possible." Evil stared up at him and wondered how everyone had gotten it so long.

Him? He thought chaos was funny. Little murder? Sure! Griefing, pranks, crime, all of it was in his wheelhouse. It made it easy to demonize him and damn it, he reveled in it. He liked being the bad guy.

But really, way too many thought of his brother as the helpful nice guy.

“Maybe some more time alone will help?” Xisuma said, tilting his head in thought. Evil shuddered.

“Not there.” He rasped out. He hated that section of the void, if it could be called that. Something twisted and wrong, carved out of Watcher magic. He could feel eyes watching him at every moment. There were no shadows to hide in, no peace in chaos to be found.

“I can’t trust you on the server.” Xisuma said. “And tough love had worked with you before.”

Yeah, because he spent so long with eyes on him, he was willing to tolerate the hermits’ particular brand of family to stay out of it.

The worst part was how stupidly earnest the other was. He could bribe, lie, cheat his way out of most punishments. But Xisuma was honestly certain this was the right thing to do. Evil rejected all other options but time in the void made him ‘better’.

“I’ll rip him apart.” Evil hissed because better a punishment warned than one half heartedly given. He wasn’t losing street cred for this. “I’ll rip you apart for this. One day, you’re server will fall.”

“You’ve been saying that for years.” Xisuma said, metal shattering under his hands before he pulled away. “The void it is. Hopefully, you’ll be on better behavior next time you come out.”

He wouldn’t.

Evil roared as the world twisted around him, the itching feeling of eyes on him as he fell into a pool of black. He hit what could be counted as ground, in some bizarre sideways world, checking his armor.

Ruined. That would slow down him breaking out and Xisuma knew it.

Good luck to that fucking kid. He’d need it. Evil was done getting involved.

He should go back to trying to destroy the server. Much more satisfying.

Ranboo was Not Having A Good Time.

First, the world exploded which yeah, cool, Ranboo had long since past the point of caring. He’d forget within five minutes, probably easier in the long run. And it’s not like he was there for long because then he got yanked off the server.

Which. Rude. But also past him drew a dragon with exclamation points around it in his journal so like. Probably very reasonable in the long run.

And then as if this couldn’t get weirder, he got dragged off to some sort of sci fi chamber where people asked prying questions and messed around in his code. And wow, that was not good for his self esteem. Never great to hear people start throwing around words like “possessed”, “viruses”, and “oh dear code, what the fuck has the admin been doing”.

Mystery solved. Dream messed him up. Really messed him up. As in messed him up so badly he was now considered evidence.

He asked if they meant a witness and someone had winced and said Dream had taken several lengths to make sure he couldn't really ever testify to everything. Ranboo's hands tightened on his book.

And then he was shoved out to sit on a little bench while they debated what to do with him.

He didn't even get to pick.

It's not like he really got to pick before, or at least he didn't think he did. He had just kind of woken up in the Dream SMP, with Dream giving him the rules speech. And before that was a complete blank. If he hopped servers, he didn't remember it.

But it looked like that streak was about to continue. Apparently, he needed a lot of resources to sort out his messed up code and a lot more attention than most servers would give. On top of that, he was still young enough to need server guardianship? Apparently? Ranboo had never had a single reasonable adult in his life, he thinks, so he wasn't sure what that meant. So now it was just a waiting game until someone decided to pick him.

Yay.

Irrationally, he felt himself wishing for Tommy or Tubbo to be here. They would have spoken up and demanded the right to pick. When Ranboo found himself standing in front of the council, he choked.

He wished he knew where they were. He'd rather be with them.

"Kid?" Ranboo looked up. Someone was leaning over him, another admin in a bumblebee suit. "You okay? Need some milk?"

It took him a moment to register. "Milk?"

"I'd offer water but you're clearly an Enderman hybrid." Ranboo winced. Of sorts. Not even his hybrid status was clear. The admin nodded at the bench. "Can I sit?"

"Uh, yeah. Not like I can stop you, man. Go ahead." There was a soft clinking sound as the other admin sat down. Ranboo tapped his claws on his journal, trying to play it cool.

He failed immediately but it was the thought that counts.

"What's your name?" The admin asked. Ranboo flushed violet, realizing he'd skipped a step.

"Ranboo. Yours?"

"Xisuma, admin of Hermitcraft. What's going on? You look like they just announced the end of your server." The admin said. Hermitcraft? That sounded familiar but he wasn't sure from where. Ranboo shook his head, dismissing it.

“They kinda did.” Ranboo said with a wince. Dream SMP was well and truly gone.

“Oh. You must be the Ranboo that Tommy talks about.” Ranboo jerked, turning to the admin.

“You know Tommy? Is he safe? Happy?” He had searched all over when Tommy disappeared but ultimately found nothing. It had strained L’Manburg to the breaking point and worse, Ranboo lost one of his only friends.

Tommy could be kind of a jerk but he had him in the friend list for a reason!

The admin nodded. “He’s doing fine. He joined my server for protection, and been recovering from what’s going on.”

Ranboo slumped in relief. “That’s good to hear.” He said. Tommy deserved some good stuff to happen to him. What bits and pieces he could remember of Logsteadshire, he didn’t like.

“And you?” The admin prompted. “Where are you going? I assume you have a server in mind.”

“I, uh, not really? I don’t even really remember any servers.” Ranboo said. He never had any written in his memory journal at least. He tilted his head at the doors. “That’s what they’re talking about now. They’re gonna assign me one.”

“Oh.” The admin said. They say in silence for a moment. “We could take you.”

“What?”

“It makes sense.” The admin said, nodding to herself. “Our server is small and well established enough to provide the assistance you’ll likely need if the debate is going on for this long. And Tommy could use a friend from his server, someone to remind him.”

“Really?” Ranboo said. Part of him was hesitant but the other part was... kinda excited? It sucked to have to join a new server but at least he got to stay with one of his friends rather than deal with complete strangers. And he got to feel like he could choose.

And Xisuma seemed nice. A little weird but nice. Dream had never offered him milk when he seemed down. That was good, right?

“Absolutely. I’ll talk to them right now.” Xisuma said confidently. He stood, holding a hand out to Ranboo who hesitated, glancing down at his memory journal.

“Can we... get my cats?” He asked hopefully. “They were part of my old world but I kind of miss them. Is there a way to get them back?”

“I’ll get them for you.” Xisuma said. Ranboo cautiously took his hand, allowing the admin to pull him back to his feet.

He didn’t know why the council looked so nervous when they agreed to Xisuma’s proposal.

Chapter End Notes

To clarify, Techno is currently in Hypixel. What happened was that when he was called to help, he basically started feeding into the war spirits to get more powerful (aka chat and the Blood God). But when too far on the other end of the spectrum and basically fell into a cycle where all he could think about was war, and forgot why he took that path in the first place. I was planning to write the scene out, but honestly, just felt weird writing it so I scrapped it instead. So, now Techno's trapped playing Skyblock for a long while.

And Evil X... Xisuma really wants their sibling to be better! Really! They just really don't understand how sending someone to their room works. Fundy is also being sent into timeout, but honestly? Better than what could have happened if Iskall hadn't advocated for them.

Xisuma saw Ranboo and just went yoin, new kid.

Waking Up (Again)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Waking up felt like he was dragging himself out of a steep hole with his nails. For a moment, he thought about pretending to be asleep. He couldn't remember what knocked him the fuck out, but he was pretty certain he hadn't gotten to bed in his own house, safe as can be.

But then a dreadful, awful ringing joined with the pain. Tommy hissed with pain, curling up into a ball and pressing his forehead into his knees. He couldn't keep his breathing even, close to hyperventilating.

But being awake? Being awake hurts like a motherfucker. It felt like a wither skeleton had grabbed his head and used it like a soccer ball. He hissed again, trying to bite back the pain. It didn't work. His skull would like to file a formal complaint about how it's been treated.

It wasn't as bad as manifesting but it was pretty fucking bad. Like, two thirds of the way there. And considering manifesting nearly killed him, it hurt pretty fucking bad.

"Oh, now that's not a great sign." Tommy hissed again as someone delicately grabbed his head, one thumb stroking over his temple. "How's it feel on a scale of one to ten?"

The voice was unfamiliar but that was turning into a far too familiar situation. Far too many times, he had been knocked out and woken up to strangers. He should start charging for this, he thought before immediately wincing again.

He needed to get the number of the ravager that ran him over. He wanted to sue.

Fuck you, Tommy wanted to say. But didn't. His mouth formed the words but nothing actually came out. He wheezed, trying again. Still nothing.

What the fuck?

"I'm guessing that means a ten." Oh, now that voice was familiar. Even out of his mind with pain, he would recognize the mechanical roughness that edged the words. "I'll try to temper it but--"

"Don't." The other warned. "If you do that, you could make it much much worse. Come on, you're supposed to be the code guy around here."

A soft huff. "I know. I just don't like seeing him in pain." Tommy kept working through all the swears he knew, even the ones in different languages. Nothing. Not even the Piglin ones that he managed to wheedle Techno into teaching him. It was like the words were there, but they got stuck just before he could speak them. "Tommy? Buddy, those aren't going to work for you anymore."

“What did you do?” Tommy snapped, grimacing in rage and pain. This couldn’t be normal or natural. He didn’t know of any side effects of manifesting or server hopping that meant he couldn’t swear.

“I have been warning you for some time now to cease that behavior. It’s rude, bothers some of the other players, and it’s not good for your mental well-being. So, I’ve taken measures to finally add you to the server screening list, just like I’ve added the other players. You’ll no longer be able to say those words.”

They did what?

Fuck, he had heard about ban words list but that was too fucking far! He had never agreed to joining the server like that!

“You can’t do that!” Tommy snapped, lurching up as his eyes flew open. Automatically, he shrunk back with a hiss of pain.

Even the dim light of the room felt like a dagger to the skull. He blinked what were definitely not tears out of his eyes quickly, trying to inch his eyes open again.

A cold metal hand covered his eyes before he could. “You shouldn’t try to hurt yourself further.” Xisuma chided. Tommy scoffed. They kidnapped him! They had no say in this!

“You shouldn’t try to hurt yourself further, meh meh meh, that’s what you sound like.” He snapped. Unfamiliar person wheezed. “Where am I? What happened?”

“What do you remember?” The unfamiliar guy asked. Tommy scrunched up his face, thinking back.

He remembered blowing up the market, that was for sure. Kind of the part where Xisuma tried to trap him like a bitch. Then he remembered crashing back into his server? Vaguely? Like, flashes of red fox fur and Tubbo.

And then- Dream? Maybe? Or- was it someone else? Techno? No?

He didn’t-

He didn’t remember.

The time after he left the server was all one big blue. Tommy didn’t notice he was hyperventilating until someone shifted him so he was pressed against their side. “Match my breathing.” They said. Tommy ignored them, continuing to wheeze.

Why couldn’t he remember? It was so close! He knew something important had happened. Something that had made his head hurt and returned him to the hermits.

But he couldn’t remember what it was.

“Splash him.” Xisuma said. Tommy jerked as cool liquid hit his face before suddenly going boneless. Weakness potion. He couldn’t even work up the energy to bare his teeth.

But this one was diluted, he noted. It felt like swimming through slime but he hadn't been knocked the fuck out. A gentle hand traced down his back and with his eyes closed, he could almost pretend he was home.

"There we go, now you're breathing right." Xisuma said, soft and hushed. "And to answer your question, we brought you home. Keralis' house specifically. It's close to my base so I can help keep an eye on you better."

"You're going to live it. I have so many cool things for you to see in my city." Keralis told him. Now he seemed more familiar. He hadn't come around much, if at all, while Tommy was recovering.

But his brain was stuck on one specific part. "Close?" He rasped why did it matter that they were close?

"I'm not going to risk that happening again." Xisuma told him, as steady as a death knell. "You were nearly killed by him. Beef and Etho live close enough that they can also help keep an eye on you. It worked out perfectly."

"Definitely why we built our bases so close together." Keralis joked.

That was... horrifying. He had thought they had been smothering before but at least he had negotiated breaks and it was never usually more than one hermit, depending on the time and the day. And now he'd be watched constantly?

That they had organized it to make sure that that would be that way?

And worse, that they had fucking planned. It made something bitterly angry in his chest well up when he thought about the hermits sitting around and discussing who got to have their turn with him, like a toy.

Or a prison warden.

What would have seemed kind of sweet before now felt prison like. It would be so much harder to escape now! Now he was pretty much right on Xisuma's doorstep.

Slowly, he opened his eyes again. The light still made his head feel like it was getting peeled apart but it was more manageable now. Not great, but manageable.

The bedroom itself was plain. Nothing but a big bed, piled high with comfy blankets and pillows. The only light came from a redstone lamp embedded on the ceiling. Keralis and Xisuma sat on the bed, neither flinching at his weak glare.

"But I didn't want to be here?" He rasped. He was pretty sure that he didn't! After everything evil X had told him, he didn't think he wanted to be with the people who lied to him.

"But you do." Keralis insisted. "You asked us to help you, didn't you?"

"When?" Tommy said.

“Before you passed out.” Xisuma filled in. Tommy scrunched up his face again. He knew he probably had passed out. Did he ask for help before that? He didn’t know. He didn’t think he would have done that but maybe?

Fuck, he hated the way they made him second guess himself. He never quite knew what he was thinking, not with them in his head.

“But I can go now?” Tommy said. They had his server now. The glitch should have been worked out by this point. Tubbo... he was pretty sure he could trust Tubbo? He felt less angry towards the other now. Tubbo could help him through the after effects of manifesting.

Quiet. “That would be a very bad idea.” Xisuma said eventually.

“Why not?” Tommy challenged. The weakness potion was wearing off faster but not fast enough for him to actually do anything. He could wriggle his toes and that was just about it. How could he use his big muscles if they refused to work?

“Tommy, you nearly died before we reached you.” Xisuma said, matter of fact. “We barely got there in time to stop your previous admin from killing you. He was going to tear your code apart.”

Tommy felt his breath stutter in his chest.

Dream.

Dream tried to kill him.

Even knowing the other had tried to kill him before didn’t make it feel any more real. Dream was supposed to be his friend. The other had said they were friends and he knew that was a lie but on some level- on some stupid, idiotic level, he thought maybe the other was right. Maybe he had been overreacting and the one in the wrong.

But the other had tried to kill him. And worse, even as he said the words, he couldn’t see a lie in it: “How do I know you’re not lying again?” He asked, trying to ignore how small his voice was. This wasn’t affecting him. It wasn’t.

“When have I ever lied to you before?” Xisuma said, sounding genuinely fucking surprised like a bitch.

“You said you didn’t know where my server was.” Tommy pointed out. And that was one of the smallest lies they had fed him. “How could you have found me otherwise?”

“I’ll concede that. But I wasn’t lying to you to hurt you. I was lying to you because we were worried for you.” Xisuma said. Tommy hated how even the other’s voice always was.

Did lying out of worry change that it was a lie?

“Worried?” Tommy said with a snort. “I wanted to go home!”

“Well, it’s not as easy as that is it?” Keralis said. He didn’t flinch under Tommy’s glare, ignoring the tail smacking the bed. “The moment you got back in your server your admin tried to kill you. Of course, we kept you from going back! It’s not safe.”

“What Keralis is trying to say.” Xisuma said, interrupting Tommy’s hiss. “Is that we didn’t inform you that we found it at first because we were building a case for the admin council. It was clear from what you had told me that your admin was unstable and you weren’t safe on his server. As a result, I deemed it necessary to keep the truth from you while we built our case until the council verified our findings.”

“I didn’t ask you to build a case or-“ Tommy choked on the long inventive stream of curse words he was going to use, reddening with fury. “I had it handled! That’s kidnapping! You adult napped me!”

“Eh, I wouldn’t say that. We rescued you.”

“Tommy, your admin locked your respawning abilities, your comms, and even a way to leave the server.”

“You won’t let me leave the server!” Tommy said back, twitching. He wanted to bite someone. Stupid weakness potions, stupid hermits.

“That’s for your safety. You can leave the server but for now, you’ll need to have an escort. You’re still I’ll and the code patches I put on you are still acclimating.” Xisuma said patiently. Tommy flinched as he reached out, one hand heavy on his shoulder. Keralis leaned against his other side. “I’m not trying to imprison you here. But I want you to be safe and right now, you’re not in good enough condition to do a server jump.”

“But I did do one.” Tommy said stubbornly. He remembered enough to know that he had gotten back to the Dream SMP. So Xisuma was lying out of his ass.

“And it knocked you out so badly you crashed for three days.” Tommy recoiled slightly, sucking in a quick breath.

Three days? He had been out for that long?

“What happened?” Tommy said. Xisuma and Keralis glanced at each other.

“When we realized you had left the server, we panicked.” Xisuma said. “We knew that your admin would likely know that a case had been out into action and would lash out at you. So, I called a full player meeting.”

“Yeah, that was not fun.” Keralis said. “Took up fifteen minutes getting Grian to settle down.”

Tommy glanced away awkwardly, not liking the small spark of guilt that lit. Grian was fine, it wasn’t his fault if the man threw a fit when he left! He knows everyone likes him but that was just kinda ridiculous.

Why throw a big fit?

“We pushed for emergency action with the council who agreed and sent someone with us.” Xisuma said. “After arriving, we found your admin trying to kill you. Presumably, his next step would have been trying to erase or damage your code.”

“But you don’t know for sure. I was winning.” Tommy said. He couldn’t really remember the fight, but big man Tommy never lost!

“Tommy, I’ve seen admins try to attack players before.” Xisuma said. “I know how it looks when an admin is willing to cheat and break code.”

“I don’t have any experience and even I knew who was trying to kill you.” Keralis said.

Xisuma continued before Tommy could cut in again: “Soon after, you fell unconscious. Zedaph took you back to Hermitcraft for safety.”

So, that confirmed it. He was back on Hermitcraft. He was pretty sure of it before, seeing the fluffy pillows and warm blankets, and even the wasteful use of redstone for a redstone lamp, but it sucked having it confirmed.

It was hard as fuck to escape Hermitcraft the first time. And now he was supposed to do it again?

“And while he was gone, we handled the rest.” Keralis said with a shrug. “Admin council let us deal with your admin ourselves.”

“Deal with?” Tommy parroted. What did that mean?

“He’s gone.” Xisuma said, leaning close. His voice was deadly serious. “He will never touch you again and you no longer have to fear him coming back. I’ve ripped his coding apart and buried it so deeply in the void he will never respawn again nor will anyone find him.”

Tommy stared at them, frozen. Dream was gone?

It didn’t feel real. Dream had always been a huge part of his life, the dramatic green teletubby never being able to settle for second best. Even before Dream SMP, he was always hearing rumors or tales of Dream’s exploits.

The speed runner. The hunted. One of the legends of the servers, he seemed practically invincible.

And he had lived up to it during the wars. One of the few who hadn’t lost any lives, despite being one of the most aggressive fighters. Tommy had dreamed of the day that he’d finally cut Dream down. Return all the pain and suffering and death the man had caused back to him.

Take back control of his life in the best way possible. Because if he defeated Dream, that meant he could never hurt again.

But he was dead.

Completely dead apparently.

“What about his ghost?” Tommy asked, grimacing at the thought of Ghost Dream wandering around like Ghostbur. The thought made him want to puke.

“His what?”

Xisuma slowly shook his head. “I don’t... Ghosts like the one we saw there? Because those don’t exist outside of your server or other servers with afterlife coding.”

“Oh, that ghost! Yeah, I think the last time we did ghost coding, we were playing Demise.” Keralis said nostalgically. “And honestly? Your admin isn’t getting out of where Xisuma put him.”

Tommy couldn’t help how his shoulders slumped a little in relief, leaning a bit heavier on Keralis.

He wanted his vengeance. But there was something, maybe, just a little bit, nice about knowing Dream was gone. Because the hermits had disappeared so many players trying to break in that it wasn’t out of the question that they had disappeared Dream.

He didn’t trust it forever... but it was nice. To think that Dream would be forever gone.

Now, who’s exiled? Fuck yeah, Tommy stays winning.

“But why can’t I go home now?” Tommy huffed, tail thwapping Xisuma in the side. “He’s dead then, ain’t he? Danger gone. I get to move in, you guys move on with your life though tragically missing the big man himself.”

Xisuma and Keralis looked at each other.

Tommy really didn’t like that look. That was the same look that had him having to work around the banned words list which he was still pissed about. It wasn’t the first time people had enforced banned words on him, but it was the first time it had covered every swear word!

Who the fuck does that?

“Buddy.” Keralis started slowly. “What do you think happens to a server when their admin is killed or removed?”

“It gets a new admin?” Tommy said. 2b2t had gotten new admins before. He kind of assumed it would be the same process here. He wasn’t sure who the new admin would be though he wouldn’t turn the status down. Adminship was cool.

“That does happen in some cases.” Xisuma said. He shifted so he was sitting closer to Tommy. “But Tommy, the server was unrecoverable. The life system was unstable, the admin hoarding of controls meant that most coding was completely locked and there was even a server mechanism that had gained consciousness and gone out of control. In your case alone, the server glitched so badly that it kicked you into a new server and glitched your personal coding.”

Tommy’s throat felt tight. “And?”

It was bad but unrecoverable? Nah, that stuff should be fixable!

“It’s gone.” Xisuma said. “Completely gone. What could have survived was torn apart by retribution and the void. There’s nothing you can return to.”

Tommy-

Tommy felt himself break.

“You’re lying.” He whispered. “You’re lying to me, you wronguns, you’re lying. It can’t be gone it can’t be.”

“I’m not. See?” And Xisuma opened his hands and there was a little window and in that window was nothing but void and ruined code.

Tommy stared at it blankly, not trusting his eyes.

That wasn’t possible. It wasn’t. Dream SMP hadn’t been great but, but it had been home. It was supposed to be his forever home, the server he would always return to, even when everyone knew his name.

That was supposed to be it. No more anarchy servers, more freedom then living with SBI.

Dream SMP was where he met Tubbo and where he met Dream. It was where L’Manburg rose and then he was thrown into his first civil war. Where he lost his first two lives, was exiled, but also became a general and Vice President of a country. Lost his family and gained a new one.

It was never supposed to disappear. It was supposed to be forever. Wilbur promised forever.

Distantly, he knew they were holding him. The same people who had watched his server died were holding him, making shushing noises and wiping away the hot tears that streamed down his face.

He should stab them. Rip them apart with his new claws or scramble off the bed and start running until he couldn’t run away.

Instead, Tommy collapsed into their arms, making a soft wheezing crooning sound.

Dream SMP was gone. L’Manburg, Pogtopia, Logsteadshire, like it never even existed.

Maybe.

Maybe they were lying. Maybe this was just another tactic to keep him pinned to this server now that the first had failed. That could be any server ruins that Xisuma had shown him. But did it matter?

Something told him that this wasn’t a lie. Maybe it was the cheery certainty that Xisuma had delivered the news. Or the way the screen was still open, code still crackling as it burned.

“What about my friends?” Tommy whispered, voice strangled through his sobs. “Where are they?”

“Depends.”

It was the second worst thing Xisuma could have told him.

Chapter End Notes

Tommy’s going through it.

Xisuma: Happy time! Your server or old admin can never hurt you again!

Tommy: ...wait

What's Left?

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: Nonconsensual touching, forced apology

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Depends?” Tommy said, his voice jumping an octave. His claws punctured through the blanket on his lap and Keralis sighed, reaching out to carefully de tangle his hands.

He swatted his hands away, hissing. Only to yelp as a heavy head fell on the back of his neck.

“No.” Xisuma said warningly, grip tight and cold. Tommy hissed, and a gentle sigh was the only warning he got before Xisuma squeezed.

Except Xisuma had fucking magic hands or something because for some fucking reason, Tommy went absolutely boneless. No bone man. Full limp. He slumped awkwardly over, only able to twitch slightly.

“That’s cheating!” Tommy snapped. What the fuck was that? Why wouldn’t he move? His breathing began to quicken as he realized he really couldn’t do much more than twitch.

His body wasn’t responding to anything. He felt more than heard a small whine bubble up in the back of his throat.

“It’s alright.” Keralis said, adjusting him so he was leaning upright on their shoulder instead of slouched over his lap. “Aw, Xisuma, let him go. He didn’t mean anything by it, he was just nervous.”

“It’s important to reinforce good behavior.” Xisuma said. But he immediately let go and Tommy let out a shuddering breath as he suddenly felt his muscles come alive again, like lightning running through his limbs. “Don’t do that again. You could have seriously hurt Keralis for trying to help you.”

“He couldn’t have hurt me! I’m invincible.” Keralis said, puffing his chest out and winking at Tommy. Tommy glared back, flexing his hands to make sure they still worked.

“Keralis.”

“Fine, fine. No harm done but don’t do that again, okay? Sorry for startling you, but I’ve seen some of the other hermits get their claws tangled into blankets before and they say it’s uncomfortable.” Keralis said, leaning back. Tommy glanced at his hands, making sure they were away from him before pushing himself so he wasn’t leaning against him anymore.

That was fucking weird. He had never seen that before, some kind of magical off button. Was that a hybrid thing?

Or was it a security thing?

“What the nether was that-“

“Tommy.” Xisuma interrupted. “Apologize.”

“What?” Tommy said, incredulously. Apologize for what? He hadn’t done anything wrong!

“Keralis apologized for scaring you. You need to apologize for nearly injuring him.” Xisuma said, folding his arms. “Apologize.”

“Or what?” Tommy snapped, tail lashing. “You’ll hurt me? Kill me? Put me in the void like Dream? You can’t do anything worse than I’ve experienced.”

“I’m not going to hurt you. I know you’ve had admins punish you through pain before and I assure you, it’s not something that’ll ever happen here.” Xisuma said. “However, I cannot allow you to harm other players.”

“What are you going to do to stop me?” Tommy hissed. He braced himself for pain. Xisuma said he wouldn’t do it, but Tommy knew better than to believe him.

If they were telling the truth, then they killed Dream. Worse than killing him really. Because if what Xisuma said was right, Dream wasn’t ever coming back. And wasn’t that the worst thing you could do to a player? Dream would never respawn.

He fucking deserved it.

It lined up with all the stories he had heard though. They said people who tried to break into Hermitcraft, for profit, for malicious reasons, for interest, they never appeared again. And Tommy had thought that was maybe a slight exaggeration but now he wasn’t so sure.

And that didn’t mean Tommy was looking forward to it happening to him. Sounded fucking painful and really boring.

“Tommy.” Xisuma said. He could hear the warning in his voice but Tommy refused to back down.

He didn’t see it coming. One moment, he was hissing and snarling, ready to fight back and hurt Xisuma before he could hurt him.

The next, he was slumped into Keralis’ side, completely boneless. A cold hand gripped the back of his neck.

“To answer your question from earlier.” Xisuma said, almost conversational. “This is the scruffing reflex. Not every hybrid has something like this, but they’re quite common in the more animalistic tending hybrids: cats, dogs, dragons.”

Animalistic. Tommy wasn't a huge fan of that word. It still made him a little queasy, to know that part of him was now other.

As cool as being a hybrid was, it was pretty fucking bizarre when his baseline had always been human. He saw the world through a human's eyes and now, someone was trying to slap a filter over it.

And he definitely wasn't sure if he liked it if it came with off buttons.

"What he means to say is that this isn't going to hurt you." Keralis assured. Tommy couldn't even quite work up a hiss, letting Keralis adjust him into a more comfortable position. "The reflex is just a bit strong in younger hybrids."

Was Keralis calling him a child? It kind of sounded like Keralis was calling him a child and Tommy was not on board with that. How dare he?

"When I let go." Xisuma continued. "I want you to apologize to Keralis. If you don't, I won't hurt you. However, I will be restricting Comm usage and I'll be reconsidering if you're responsible enough to go see your friends if you're willing to harm them."

Tommy didn't even know if it was possible to freeze further but somehow he did.

If he apologized, it's hurt his pride and his big man dignity. He didn't want to apologize! Keralis didn't even get hit, it wasn't a big deal at all.

But on the other hand, no Comm. No way to try and call for help or see what happened to the others. And he'd be stuck with these guys. Not to say the other hermits were better, they were all kinds of wronguns even if they were better than Dream. But ugh, he was not looking forward to nest time again.

Nest time was boring! He never got to go anywhere or do anything, he just had to lay down and nap. Which was nice, for all of a little bit, and then he was just plain bored.

Sometimes the hermits would show him videos or tell him stories. Which he definitely did not miss, but he was pretty sure Xisuma wasn't talking about that kind of nest time.

On the other, other hand, Tommy had no idea what the fuck was going on.

Dream was dead, Xisuma said "depends" for everyone else, and he had been dragged back to Hermitcraft like a particularly troublesome villager.

All was adding up to mean that right now he needed information.

Prime, he wished he had Tubbo here right now. Tubbo would have known exactly what to say to convince them to tell him everything. He was good with people like that, even if he did end up being a bit of a yes man.

Tommy forced himself to swallow his pride, not even able to grimace. This would be for Tubbo, and Ranboo, and Fundy, and all the people who didn't deserve to get mixed up in whatever this insanity was.

“There.” Xisuma said, releasing his hand. Tommy grimaced, hating the electric tingle that danced along his muscles as they suddenly came alive again. “Now, do you have anything you want to say to Keralis?”

“I’m sorry.” Tommy forced out.

“For?” Xisuma coaxed. “A good apology is important. What are you sorry for?”

Not ripping your lungs out. “I’m sorry for trying to scratch you.” Tommy rushed out, avoiding their eyes. Would they take that?

“I forgive you.” Keralis said, nodding very seriously. Tommy had to resist the urge to roll his eyes.

He hated this. It felt weirdly similar to when he’d have to ‘apologize’ to Wilbur or Dream for misbehaving. Those times, he had to add the extra detail too. He couldn’t tell whether they wanted to mock him, or this was some sort of normal thing.

Part of him leaned a bit towards mockery.

Eyes on the prize, big man. That stupid fake apology wasn’t going to be for nothing, not if he had his way. “So, what did you mean when you said depends earlier?” He asked. “What happened to my friends?”

“Tommy.” Xisuma looked at Keralis and Keralis shrugged. “Most of those people weren’t your friends.”

“What? Of course they were! You don’t even know them!” Tommy accused. Well, yeah, most of them did let him get exiled or fought against him in wars.

But that didn’t mean they didn’t care about him. Because they had to, didn’t they? He had lived on Dream SMP for so long that- that some of them had to care about him. Dream had to have been lying to him.

They did care about him. They did.

“Tommy, your admin abused you. What you’ve told me of your punishments, would be illegal in most worlds and the latter only permissible in terms of negotiated roleplay everyone agrees on.” Xisuma said, and Tommy barely noticed as one gloved hand wrapped around his. “It’s fair to say that the younger players like you wouldn’t understand.”

“Even locking the server down was messed up.” Keralis chimed in, propping a hand up on his chin. “The admin can’t just decide to do that. They need to have permission and oversight from an outside member.”

“I’m not a child.” Tommy spat. He had fought in two wars, and that was just the Dream SMP. The biggest of men was an adult. “And I’ve been on multiple servers.”

The server lockdown had sucked, yeah, but it was manageable! The punishments...

Exile wasn't a big deal. It hadn't been. He had handled it like a champ.

"An anarchy server and one that was mildly neglectful towards its younger players." Xisuma corrected. "Every admin has a responsibility for ensuring the safety and well-being of their younger players because they often don't know what's against the laws, how to keep themselves safe, or how to get out of a situation that's going too far."

Well, now he was calling him in-comp-e-tent but in fancy lingo. "I know what I'm doing!" Tommy protested.

"You didn't even know how to contact the admin council for help." Xisuma said. "Tommy, that's basic knowledge. Even in cases where you can't contact the council, there's a way to reach out to an outside official for help."

Tommy felt his face warm. Look, it's not his fault he had never heard of the fancy high and mighty council! He had better things to do like getting TNT or starting a country! Xisuma wouldn't understand. He twisted the edge of the blanket, hard, until it threatened to tear between his fingers.

"What Xisuma is trying to say." Keralis said before Tommy could argue the child point again, "Is that even if you or the other kids didn't know about server laws or protecting yourselves, the other players should have."

"Several of the players were even admins prior to joining the Dream SMP, yes?" Tommy felt his head jerk in a tiny nod. Philza and Wilbur had been admins, but Techno said he had never been interested. Too much socializing for him. "Admins are required to take counseling on recognizing abuse and fair and appropriate punishments. Many of the other adult players had to have been on servers where they learned these rules as well."

The blanket tore. Just a little bit. And Tommy thinks he tore a little bit with it.

If Xisuma was telling the truth... they knew what Dream was doing was wrong. They knew Tommy was right when he protested Dream, when L'Manburg went to war to defend itself.

When Tommy protested his exile.

Some of the others had even come to visit him. Sapnap, Bad, even Techno. Techno should have protected him! Did they really know what was going on was wrong?

Tubbo didn't know, he knew that for a fact. Tubbo had jumped server to server like him. Ranboo, definitely fucking wouldn't. That dude couldn't remember where he built his house without checking a book. Fundy, probably not? He had known his nephew for most of their life.

The others... he wasn't so sure about.

Part of him wanted to believe Xisuma was lying. The other admin had lied to him before, telling him he didn't know where his server was and that he could go back home eventually. He could be lying now, twisting his head so he didn't know up from down.

But what if he wasn't, a little voice whispered, what if he wasn't lying? And they did know? And they let it happen anyways?

Xisuma gently pulled Tommy's hands away from the blanket, holding them between his. "I know this is stressful to hear." He said.

"You didn't say what's happening to them." Tommy said, clearing his throat to make sure his voice was big and strong and not because it was kind of tiny.

"A few, one or two, are being sent to other servers. They'll be under monitoring to ensure that they're safe and ready to acclimate to server life again." Xisuma said. "Most... are in holding. They got swept in the retribution and they'll need time to respawn."

"You hurt them?!"

"They hurt you." Xisuma corrected, not letting Tommy pull his hands away. "Through negligence or outright abuse, as your admin, I had the right to protect you on your behalf."

"You didn't even ask me." Tommy protested. He was fucking unconscious! He should have had a say in what was going on, not just be completely ignored!

"We can talk about you getting a price later." Keralis said with a shrug. "It was a bit of a messy thing, you being attacked basically meant everything got sped up at once."

"Keralis is right. If things had proceeded as planned, we would have reached an accord with the council and you would have likely been recovered mentally enough to give your thoughts in the matter." Xisuma said, his mask holding Tommy's gaze.

Tommy swallowed a bit hard, trying not to listen to the little voice that whispered that this was his fault. After all, if he hadn't ran away, they wouldn't have had to change the plans.

He ruthlessly shoved that little voice away. It wasn't his fault they decided to go fucking crazy! It wasn't. That was all on them.

"What's going to happen to them? Gonna kill them off like you did with Dream? What happened to Tubbo and Fundy?" They had been with him when he had fallen unconscious, trying to protect him.

"Goodness no. Their actions or inaction are inexcusable, but currently not at the level of your former admins. They'll be released to the council for individual judgement, with the council deciding if they'll be moved to a server with a healthier safety net, jailed, or punished further." Xisuma said. He glanced to his Comm. "I think a few of the cases are already going on right now."

"Yeah." Keralis squinted at the ceiling, thinking hard. "One or two requested immediate transportation and judgement. Some kind of shark totem person and their friends. Zedaph was offended."

Tommy squinted at Keralis. "Why would- Zedaph had gotten offended?" Prime, he fucking hated speaking now with the swear word ban. He kept tripping over the spaces where swear

words should be.

It sounded so much less effective like this! This was bullshit.

“He was having fun.” Keralis said cryptically. Tommy stared at him. He didn’t like the sound of that.

“But what about- fricking specifically Tubbo and Fundy? The ones who were with me?” Tommy asked.

They better not have killed them. Magical off button or scruffing or whatever wouldn’t stop him from killing them. Nobody hurt Tubbo. And he definitely didn’t deserve jail! He’d be breaking Tubbo out if Tubbo didn’t nuke the jail first.

“Those?” Xisuma said for a moment before perking up slightly. “Oh, those guys?”

“Yes! Those guys!” Tommy said hotly, claws starting to dig into the blanket again. “What did you do to them?”

“Well, Fundy is fine. Though he very narrowly escaped punishment for the foolish mistake he made.” Xisuma said with a sharp exhale. Tommy stiffened, narrowing his eyes.

“I asked him to do that.” Tommy said. He was the one who messaged Fundy and asked to be sent home! “That was- agh, me!”

“He brought you into a very dangerous situation, nearly leading to your death.” Xisuma maintained like a bitch. “While perhaps not at the level of your admin, he did at some level knowingly send you into danger and I would have been well within my rights to deal with him in order to protect you.”

Tommy scoffed, glaring at the mattress. “What did you do to him?” He asked. He and Fundy may not have gotten along a lot, being that he was a traitorous bitch during Pogtopia. They weren’t as close as they probably should have been.

But that didn’t mean he wanted the fox hybrid to be permanently dead. If only because it would have made Wilbur sad, Tommy justified it to himself. Just for that. The real Wilbur never wanted any harm to come to Fundy, even if he was really fucking overprotective.

“Iskall vouched for him as having a good character and Bdubs offered an alternative solution.” Xisuma said, calmly. “He’ll be playing on one of Iskall’s side servers, the Vault Hunter one. We’ll be able to keep an eye on him and decide what will happen further down the road.”

“You trapped him there.”

“I’ve been to Vault Hunters, it’s very fun.” Keralis said with a shrug, looking up from his Comm. “He’ll enjoy it.”

Tommy scowled. He was pretty sure he had heard of Vault Hunters before, vaguely at least. Pretty fucking vague. It was more of a rumor than Hermitcraft but everything he heard about

it said that it was incredible, a feat of coding that made for a great adventure.

Something about it... just sat wrong. Somehow.

But at least Fundy wasn't dead. That was... pretty fucking good. He could work with that at least. He wasn't sure quite how yet, but he'll figure it out. Maybe steal Iskall's Comm again and message Fundy.

"And Tubbo?" He asked, leaning forward. "What about Tubbo?"

And something surprising happened.

Xisuma flinched.

Just slightly. Just a little bit. A tiny jerk. Tommy pounced on it. "What happened to my friend?"

"The goat hybrid? The one with the curly brown hair?" Xisuma asked. Tommy nodded vigorously, almost making himself dizzy.

"That's the- him!" He said. Puffy was the only other goat hybrid on the server and she didn't have Tubbo's brown curls, well, that and Schlatt. But Schlatt was long dead.

And good riddance.

Xisuma held still for a long moment and Tommy felt his heart drop when he looked at Keralis. Keralis shook his head slowly. "Tommy- In that I fear I made an error."

There it went. His heart plunging to bedrock. "Tell me you didn't kill him." Tommy said, the blanket shredded between his claws. "TELL ME YOU DIDN'T- KILL HIM!"

"I didn't kill him." Xisuma said. "But I- it may be better if I show you."

Tommy followed.

Chapter End Notes

I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS.

(Also again, even if the person claims they have a good reason for it like Keralis, you don't have to apologize for keeping people out of your space. This is a dark fic. Boundaries are a wonderful thing.)

Life got super busy, so I had to edit this late at night. If there's any grammatical errors, just let me know and I'll fix them. I'll be doing another review when I'm more awake and less busy.

Author's Note

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: Death

In case some of you haven't heard, Tinfoilchef passed away.

It's such a strange feeling. I found out through my friend, who found out through Xisuma and verified that his sister was the one to share the news.

He was a great guy. He made incredible videos and had a presence in Hermitcraft I can't quite describe. I really looked up to him because he truly proved that age doesn't take the shine off of the things you enjoy. He plays Minecraft better than me, to be honest. It took me forever to plan out how to introduce him and when in this fic because I wanted to make sure it was fitting and natural for the role he has played in Hermitcraft and his character.

I'll be taking a week hiatus, the same as the one I did for Techno. Next Monday and Wednesday, LBAT and my H2O fic will update as normal, but this week, I'm taking some time off. It feels right. I'm going to go watch some of his videos again.

Violet Sparks

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Tommy has a full scale panic attack/mental spiral. Non-consensual drug use

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy couldn't help it. He paced. He worried at his sleeves, stopping to glare at Xisuma every so often. Aggravatingly, the bastard never even looked up from his coding. Prick. Bitch. He needed to see how mad Tommy was right now, why the fuck would he ignore him?

A portal. He said they'd take a portal to see Tubbo. Apparently, Tommy wasn't allowed free rein of the server anymore, even if Xisuma dressed it up in pretty words, saying that he had just passed out and was still delicate. He knew. He knew they were lying to him.

Tommy had been through a war and could still walk. He had felt tnt go off around him as his world crumbled in and still rode a boat around afterwards. Fuck, he'd be willing to take an elytra, if he even could with these useless wings because of fucking course, they weren't ready to use yet either.

If he listened to the hermits, he was as fragile as a leaf block.

"This is Bull." He said, savagely. Xisuma wasn't his king or his brother or even his dad. Why should he have to listen to him?

"Both Stress and Doc warned you about the health lock." Xisuma said, not even looking up from his work. "You've overstrained yourself as it is."

"How?" Tommy snapped. He felt fine. He didn't feel sick anymore, he didn't feel that weird feeling of the world twisting in on itself like he did before he passed out. He just felt normal. And pissed off.

He wasn't at full health, yet, but he had done much more with more lower health before. Why did they have to be so bitchy about it?

"It's too far."

Tommy spun towards the door again, but no, Keralis was still sitting there. Cross legged and playing on his phone like he didn't have a worry in the world. Bitch. Double bitch. How dare they do this to him. "This is false im-priso-nment. I demand to know my crimes."

"Well." Keralis started, sounding amused and not looking up from his Comm. There was the soft chime of a message and Keralis started clicking at his screen. "There was blowing up

part of the market district. That's a crime."

Tommy scoffed. Just a few minor craters! Barely some ash! If they thought that was bad, they should have seen what Wilbur did to L'Manburg. No contest, not even close, they had lost before the game even started.

Also these guys build mansions and weird shit all the time! How hard was it for them to fix it? They had stacks and stacks of dirt lying around, he had seen the state of Iskall's shulkers.

"That doesn't count." He snapped, starting to pace again. It was hard to get his panic shoved down, not wanting to give them an edge over him. But it stung. And he couldn't hide the anxiety that was slowly consuming him as he paced back and forth.

Tubbo was his best friend. Well, maybe not at the beginning of exile but he had been there when he came back. Had protected him. And Dream was such a massive bitch that he wouldn't be surprised if the other had done something to Tubbo to make him exile him. Yeah. That sounded plausible.

Tubbo had been worried in that forest. He saw it. He had thought Tommy had been dead. Which completely validated all of Tommy's actions escaping Hermitcraft in his mind because he was right! Dream had been fucking with his friends while he was gone!

And now Tubbo was... something ominous. Something Xisuma refused to talk about but apparently felt bad about. Xisuma had shut down any of Tommy's attempts to needle him into talking about it.

Dream might have been dead now but it didn't solve anything.

(He thought he should feel less afraid now. Shouldn't he? Dream was dead. There wasn't a threat anymore. There was no reason that even thinking of the stupid green bastard should make his chest feel tight and his breathing quicken. He was dead. Gone forever.

Why did he have to hold so much goddamn power over him still?)

Nothing he was coming up with seemed good. Xisuma had calmly explained Fundy's punishment, killing Dream, destroying the server. He had lied to Tommy even while he said he was a friend (because he couldn't be a friend. Right? They did all that, lied to him for... something. He'd figure it out).

Tommy had never once seen that fucker look guilty. Not even when he confronted him at the market. He had the self assured air of someone who always knew what he was doing was right.

And yet when he brought up Tubbo, he had- had hesitated. And looked guilty.

What had he done to his friend?

"Tommy." Xisuma said, looking up from his work. "Sit down. You're going to give yourself a panic attack."

A panic attack? Tommy never got panic attacks! He had never once felt an emotion of panic before. Panic was for other people. Tommy was never less than 100% logical!

Tommy wasn't having a panic attack! Ever.

"And who's fault is that?" Tommy said, sharply turning into another pacing circle. "Why won't you tell me what you did? Why isn't the portal ready yet?"

Was it a lie? Again? Were they lying to him again? Drawing this out for some reason? Fuck, maybe Tubbo was dead-

Tommy was snapped back to reality by a warm hand grabbing his wrist, pulling him to the floor. "Sit back down." Keralis advised him, not letting go of his hands. "Xisuma needs time because portals are complicated. That's all."

But the previous thought was still bouncing around his threat. Maybe Xisuma had been lying again and this was some sort of trick to kill him. The portal was a trap and they were going to kill him like they did Tubbo.

And once Tommy started thinking about the possibility, he couldn't stop.

"He needs time because they're complicated." Tommy repeated, a bit skeptical. Evil X had teleported as easily as blinking. Why was this taking so long?

"The glitch-"

"Did that even exist?" Tommy snapped bristly. He choked on the swears he wanted to say, forcing them back. "Was I ever glitched? Or was that a trick you played on me?"

He had never confirmed for himself how badly glitched he was, he just took Xisuma's word for it because why would he lie? And then he was so pathetically grateful Xisuma wasn't going to kill him for it.

Dream would be laughing at him if he was alive right now and maybe he was maybe that was a lie too and they're were working with Dream and any moment now Dream would walk through that door with that stupid smiling mask-

How was- was it even true? He didn't know. Nothing felt quite real right now, a building hiss in his chest that felt like it was racing a mile a minute. He started to tug blindly at his wrist, tail beginning to lash.

When Keralis tried to grab him, he lashed out with his claws. They scraped over Keralis' face and Keralis jerked back in surprise. He didn't see blood but Tommy screeched anyway.

(And if he felt a sudden spark of guilt light in his chest about how Keralis jerked back, shock bright in his eyes and the pale lines on the other's cheek, well, he wasn't saying anything. He deserved it. He had to have deserved it.

He shouldn't feel guilty for protecting himself.)

“Don’t touch me!” Tommy snarled, wings flaring up. He scrambled across the floor, ignoring how Keralis tried to pull him back with a wounded look. “Why do you keep lying?”

“Tommy-“ Xisuma said, hands falling away from the code work. He took a step forward and Tommy’s hissing pitched up even louder. “Tommy, breathe with me. It’s okay. You’re okay.”

“You killed him, didn’t you?” Tommy accused, a sharp scream that scraped against his throat. Keralis slowly took to feet, hands up.

“He’s not-“

“Stop lying.” Tommy said, harsh and cold and loud until it felt like his scream was something real, tearing through the air.

And then, they were real. Violet sparks, drifting from his mouth, skittering across the ground like real things. They lingered, sparking and popping before his eyes. Tommy choked on it, like taking a breath of powder snow too fast.

But it was worth it. Because Keralis and Xisuma took a step back. Because for once, he was winning and they weren’t touching him and they weren’t lying even if winning meant he was choking on a throat scraped raw, agony tracing its way up his throat as cold tears began to streak down his face.

“Tommy, stop, pure hurting yourself-“ Xisuma was the first to break the unsteady truce, taking a step forward with his hands outstretched.

“Back off!” Tommy yelled and for a moment, he thought he had lost it but no, there it was, sparks like meteors and fresh agony until the tears weren’t just from fear and sorrow.

Xisuma was forced to take a hasty step back before the violet embers could hit him.

He had to leave. Now. This place wasn’t safe, he wasn’t safe, he had to find Tubbo himself. Tommy turned and bolted for the door, still choking on the sparks that kept slipping free now, every breath a supernova.

His breath came quicker and quicker as he scrambled to open the door, wheezing sparks that discolored all the wood they touched. It felt like his heart was beating a mile a minute, about to beat right out of his chest and he heard a worrying snapping sound as he gave and just yanked on the door and ripped it open.

Tommy staggered outside, ignoring a yell from behind him as he ran into the hallway, sparks scattering in his wake. He had to flee. Had to go- somewhere. To Tubbo. He caught himself on the wall as he suddenly listed slightly, black spots dotting his vision as he coughed. His chest felt strangely cold, almost numb.

This was his best chance, he told himself, forcing himself up. The sparks hurt but Keralis and Xisuma seemed like they couldn’t touch him. He just had to find a way out.

“Tommy! Come back!” Tommy turned, baring his teeth when he realized that Xisuma was at the doorway now, only a thin barrier of sparks keeping him from following. “You’re

hurting-“

Tommy tried to screech, the sound twisting into a cough part way through as he wheezed for air. He tried again, letting sparks spray across the floor as he screamed, grief and fear and panic, loud until it was all he could hear-

And then he realized it was loud because someone else was screeching too.

And then he got bodyslammed.

Tommy screamed, barely managing to twist onto his back before he hit the ground, driving all the air out of his lungs. He choked, trying to suck the oxygen back in that had been so rudely knocked out.

A hissing warbling noise had him looking up, eyes widening as his tail flattened to the ground.

Grian looked back at him.

No not Grian. Grian had never looked so feral. So wrong. Tommy felt his brain break a little as it struggled to compute.

Grian had always been weird but weirdly normal at the same time. Always in that cozy looking red sweater with sturdy black pants, the only exceptions to his inhuman side being his unnaturally black eyes, his wings, and the colorful feathers littering his hair.

Looking at him now, Tommy wasn't sure how he ever thought his eyes were just dark.

They were black. Pitch black. As black as the void that hid below bedrock. Carefully trimmed claws were now wickedly sharp, a threat only kept away from skin by fragile fabric and oh fuck why did they not at least let him keep his armor and Tommy started to spray sparks again, panic making his heart beat faster.

Because worst of all were the eyes.

Violet, or maybe they were just so black that his eyes gave them a color just to let his head make sense of them. They floated around Grian's head, gaze trained on him, tucked in between the colorful feathers of his wings, and littered his skin. All looking at him.

Panic overruled the little voice that told him not to hurt Grian, that the other had been nothing but friendly to him because holy fuck what the fuck was that.

Tommy had fought self proclaimed gods. Had escaped from 2b2t where the laws of reality got broken on a regular basis and hybrids flaunted their advantages over humans. Had lived on Dream SMP with people whose names were whispered through dozens of servers and followed Hermitcraft videos whenever he could.

He had never seen or heard of this before.

So, Tommy did the only rational thing that came to mind. He screamed and tried to spray violet sparks at Grian's face.

Wherever the sparks touched, Grian's tan skin began to blacken. Eyes closed, becoming little thin lines, hiding away from the sparks. But Grian didn't do much as flinch as he warbled, leaning closer.

Tommy took a deep hacking breath, trying again. He didn't even see Grian move. A hand clamped over his mouth and Tommy made a strangled yelping noise, feeling like he had just had to swallow a mouthful of ice as the sparks hit Grian's hand and rebounded. He struggled, kicking and trying to claw at Grian, but the other didn't budge.

It was clear that he had hurt him but Grian didn't even seem to care.

What the fuck was he?

The soft thumping of footsteps was the only warning he got as Xisuma settled down next to him, dark visor looking down at Tommy. One hand held the familiar pink vial of health potions. But the other one got Tommy's riveted attention immediately.

Weakness.

He redoubled his efforts, kicking and screaming against Grian's hand as Xisuma started to reach for him. He didn't want the other to dose him. If he dosed him, he'd have no way of fighting back.

A wing came down between him and Xisuma, Grian hissing like an angry snake. He couldn't see Xisuma but he could hear the soft scrape of metal on the floor.

"He's hurt and in pain." Xisuma said. "And afraid. He needs the potions. Don't block me from him."

Tommy stared up at Grian, hoping he had suddenly developed telepathy so he could tell the other not to move away.

Grian stared back at him, the tilt of his head oddly bird-like.

"You're hurt as well, too." Xisuma coaxed. "Keralis is already setting up the nest. We can dose him, and get you healed and move somewhere safer. You know me Grian. You know I would never hurt him."

Don't, Tommy pleaded. And for a moment, he thought Grian would stay, and would keep Xisuma from dosing him.

The soft hush of wings moving.

Crack.

Tommy took a raspy breath as his head dropped back, his muscles going involuntarily limp. Not too strong, some hazy part of his mind supplied. Still pretty hefty stuff but they must

have diluted the spider eye concentration with water. Wilbur had showed him how to do it, once or twice, telling him it would be a safety precaution and an important tip for learning potions

He wouldn't be able to move quickly or escape, it was perfect for making sure of that. But talking? Staying awake? Yeah, that would work just fine.

He made a raspy hiss as Xisuma reached for his throat, eyes widening minutely. Grian made an uncertain warble, inhuman eyes flickering between Tommy and Xisuma. "I won't hurt you." Xisuma whispered. "But I need to check. I'm not a medic but that did not sound good for your throat. You're doing good, Grian, you're letting him get medical attention."

Lightning fast, Tommy choked as the health potion was dropped into his mouth. He grimaced up at Xisuma, mentally calculating whether it was worth it to make problems.

On one hand, he's a bitch.

On the other hand, his throat hurt like hell. And it's not like he wasn't already knocked out and having to plot his revenge through weakness potion. Reluctantly, Tommy swallowed, involuntarily relaxing a bit at the pure relief of the pain easing. It still ached, but it was a manageable kind of ache.

That got a happy bird sound. Goddamnit Grian.

"You're doing great." Xisuma said, he reached further down towards his throat. "I'm just going to take a look and see how the damage is healing."

He didn't want to check, he wanted Xisuma to fuck off. But Tommy couldn't do so much as flinch when Xisuma's hand landed on his throat.

"Stop." He rasped and Xisuma made a thoughtful humming sound.

"I guess that answers whether you would be getting an Ender Dragon's breath attack. Not every hybrid does." Xisuma said, thankfully shifting back. "But your throat is nowhere near developed enough to fully utilize it. If you kept going like that, you likely would have heavily damaged your vocal cords, at the very minimum."

Breath attack? What the fuck? Was that the spark thing?

But Tommy refused to admit he didn't know something to Xisuma. "I'm fine." He said, tactfully ignoring the fact that his throat felt like he had rated a fire charge. "F you. Let me up."

"Did you really just say 'f you'?" Xisuma said, annoyingly sounding bemused instead of insulted. "You shouldn't be speaking right now. You don't want to cause any more damage."

Tommy rolled his eyes. He was fiiinnne. A little throat pain never kept him down! "Who made you king." He slurred. "Not ffff- Dream."

Grian hissed at the name, flopping on top of Tommy. Tommy wheezed. Ow. Why the fuck was Grian so bony? He was short, he shouldn't have that many bones!

"Right. I'm calling Zedaph. He knows what to do for dragon manifestation after effects." Xisuma said. He paused before he could pull out his Comm. "And Doc as well. Can you get Tommy to the nest, Grian? And keep him there for me."

"Noooo, why." Tommy said. He wanted to snarl but his face muscles weren't responding right.

This was why he hated weakness potions. The panic, well, justified anger, was still there. It hadn't gone away, squashed in a tight ball in his chest. But now it was stuck there and he couldn't get it out. He couldn't run, couldn't scream, even the sparks had stopped.

But under the heavy blanket of exhaustion, he still felt afraid.

"Because Zedaph worries about you and unfortunately, I don't know everything about dragon hybrids. I don't want to hurt you if I do something wrong." Xisuma said. He reached out, setting a hand on Tommy's shoulder. "I know you might not believe me right now, but I promised I would never hurt you. That includes making sure you're healthy."

"The what the nether is up with him?" Tommy whispered, jerking his chin at Grian. Was he vibrating? Was that normal? Why were the eyes staring at him??

"Grian is... a rather different case." Xisuma said, ruffling a hand through Grian's hair. The other cooed, leaning into it. Oh man, Grian was deep in his instincts right now. "He'll tell you about it himself. It's time we go to the nest, right? I bet Keralis is all done by now?"

"No!" Tommy yelped but Grian was already rushing to pull him off to the floor, a litany of happy chirps spilling from his mouth. He was awkwardly scooped off the ground by Xisuma, hissing in frustration where he laid curled against cold armor.

Not again!

"What's going on?"

Tommy froze.

He looked up.

Familiar scars. Fluffy brown hair. Curling horns. Even the green shirt he had stopped wearing when he became President.

And instantly, everything became better. Because Tubbo was alive, really alive, and here in front of him.

"Tubbo." Tommy whispered, not quite sure what else to say. He glanced at Xisuma, calculating if they could both take Xisuma and Grian out. They probably could, right? Yeah. "Tubbo, you-"

“Oh, hey, Tommy! Got into a bit of trouble with the boss man?” Tubbo said. Casual. Too casual. He wandered closer, cheerily head bonking Tommy. Like he didn’t even notice the weakness particles floating off of him.

Tommy frowned. “Why are you acting weird?” Tubbo was never so casual around strangers. That weird kind of uptight where he pretended to be casual, yeah, but not casual comfortable. But he was acting like everything was perfectly fine.

“What do you mean?” Tubbo asked, tilting his head, shaggy curls flopping into his eyes.

“What, did you hit your head before you left Dream SMP?” Tommy said, huffing as his head fell back against Xisuma’s armor. Ugh. Stupid weakness potion. He wanted to hug Tubbo.

“What’s Dream SMP?”

Tommy froze.

And behind him, Xisuma flinched.

Chapter End Notes

Bet you weren’t expecting that.

Choices Made

Chapter Notes

I'm very fond of flashback chapters.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy stared at Tubbo, searching his face for a lie. Tubbo was... he wouldn't say a great liar. He could bullshit till the cows came home but his lies tended towards the extreme or ridiculous. Despite that, he had been a good spy in Pogtopia. When it came down it, Tubbo was a really fucking good liar.

It was possible that maybe this was an elaborate lie.

(Tommy hoped it was an elaborate lie.)

But he couldn't find anything. Not a hint. No secret hand signals or little bits of code. Not even a flash of a hidden weapon or guarded eyes. Tubbo looked perfectly calm and at ease and the only time that that got shaken was when Tommy asked him about the SMP. And that had been with confusion. Tommy had known him for years and could pick out his little codes like a bloodhound.

In fact- that was the strange thing he had first noticed. The realization that was slowly, horrifyingly coming to him in pieces. This wasn't Tubbo.

Okay, well, yeah, it probably was him. Tommy wasn't an idiot. He could tell the difference between his Tubbo and an imposter. Nothing could capture how goddamn weird Tubbo could be. It was Tubbo and it wasn't Tubbo because this was the Tubbo he had first met on that sunny day.

Before the SMP. Before L'Manburg. Before the revolution and the control room and Pogtopia and the yellow box and the civil war and the presidency. Before everything. This was the Tubbo he found in a flower field, watching the bees fly by, who threatened to break all of his bones with a spoon. Completely innocent. The marks of war were there, the scars along his face and the chips in his horns but Tubbo held himself differently despite them

Tommy stared, not quite sure what to say. Actually, he knew what he wanted to say. Every single goddamn swear word he knew. But he couldn't say that, his mouth gluing shut so he couldn't violate the ban.

"The place we briefly talked about." And Tommy wanted to kill Xisuma, rip his mask off and beat him with it. Tubbo's forehead creased. "Tommy is still dealing with trauma. Do you mind if I talk to him alone for a bit?"

“Don’t” Tommy rasped. But it was already too late. Tubbo had turned away, walking out of the room with a casual wave. Too casual. Tubbo didn’t even think it was odd that Xisuma was holding him. If it wasn’t for the weakness potion, Tommy would have already gone for Xisuma’s throat. But all he could do was shake in place.

Tubbo forgot. Everything maybe because how deep did it go? He remembered Tommy but did he remember Technoblade? Schlatt? Even Wilbur? Did he remember him and Tommy during the SMP?

“What.” Tommy said, gritting his teeth. “Did you do.”

“It’s not quite as bad as it seems.” Xisuma is quick to assure. But the assurance is quickly undercut by a quiet sigh and he leans heavily against the wall. “I- in dealing with your admin, I made a mistake.”

“That’s not telling me what you did. Tell me what you did to my friend.” Tommy hisses. His hand shifted slightly, claws trying to close on impenetrable armor. He wanted to bite so bad. Chomp, chomp, bitch.

“What happened was-”

Xisuma rolled his shoulders, more habit than anything. His shoulders and hands were incapable of strain but the hermits had bugged him about keeping up self care and who was he to deny them? Around him, code seemed to shred itself into inky black, a prison lying in wait.

He could have made it faster, but Grian had quite a lot of stress to work out. The other hermits too. Seeing the horrible admin who had cruelly abused a young player in his care got them all going. Xisuma might have participated himself if, well, if it wasn’t for the fact that he would be the final arbiter.

What had started as a horrible evening had ended quite pleasantly. Despite the stress of Tommy disappearing, it had led to them activating emergency protocols. False had already carried Tommy back to the server directly and reported he was none the worse for where, safely curled up in one of the many nests. A bit injured and tired, but nothing that could be fixed with constant care and comfort.

The other players had been swiftly dealt with, though Xisuma had lingered a bit of the punishment of the one Tommy had called father. A fitting one, if he did say so himself. All that was left was finishing the prison and leaving this horrible place behind.

“Almost done here as well.” Doc said, wiping his hands. The kid. Tommy’s friends, if his information was correct. Doc had elected to treat him before making the jump back, worried about his head injury. “He should be stable enough to move now.”

“Alright then.” Xisuma said. At a flick of the hand, code raced over to wrap around the kid and Doc. A slower program, nothing too bumpy. A nice smooth ride he had built after

realizing far too many times he was transferring injured people out of nightmarish servers. He hated the necessity of the program.

With that working, he turned back to where Grian stood, hunched over a pathetic corpse that flickered and crackled with code. A pair of blinding white eyes watched Xisuma next to him and Xisuma nodded at Joe. The other slow blinked back, clearly proud at how he had helped shred the code.

All that could be made out through flickering code and deep wounds was lime green. The remains of half a shattered porcelain mask laid on the ground nearby. Well, were laying there. Mumbo was systematically crushing every last shard, humming a cheery tune as he did. He must have been annoyed that the redstone machines took up enough time that he got here long after Dream had been defeated.

And defeated he was. The former admin made a low buzzing sound as Xisuma drew closer, unable to speak.

Even if this Dream character ever escaped the void, Xisuma would be rather shocked if he managed to put himself together after what they had done to him. Unseen behind the mask, a smile of pride slipped across his face.

He had done it to himself practically. The lack of respawns had been easy enough to twist to make sure he couldn't escape and while the other admin had shown some knowledge of glitches and coding, it was nothing next to the skill of someone like Xisuma or Joe. There were benefits to being alive so long.

After that, it had been easy work to systematically cut him off from his ability to influence the server world, making sure he couldn't harm any of the hermits. That had been a lesson Xisuma had learned early on, when he had to deal with a rather terrible admin with a deep hatred of hybrids. Creative mode and tnt could be dangerous.

He wouldn't say he enjoyed the work but there was something satisfying in knowing that someone so horrible had been dealt with. That all of his players were safe and not going to be harmed. Tommy may be stressed for a while more but now they could proceed knowing that he was safe.

Xisuma crouched down, carefully steering Grian away. "Later." He said, watching eyes blink out of existence. Grian had taken Tommy's disappearance even worse than Zedaph and False.

It was good seeing him so much less stressed though. "I'll handle this." Xisuma said, reaching for the remnants of code. He flicked open his code window, readying the teleport command.

His life would get so much easier after this.

But in the moment before he could execute, the code burst into a frenzy of motion. Xisuma moved without thinking, pushing Grian and Mumbo behind him at the same time.

But the scrambled code's goal wasn't him.

And when Xisuma hears the scream, he knows he messed up.

He hadn't-

Normally nothing could interfere with a teleport out of a server by players who didn't belong to it. Particularly if said teleportation was caused by a higher level admin, which Xisuma certainly was. Never once had he had something directly interfere with it.

Try to reroute it, yes. Try to stop it, yes. Try to use it to escape their own punishments, yes. All of those were possibilities he expected and made sure to cover when he was dealing with... past admins.

But he had made two miscalculations. One, he had thought of Dream as his admin powers. Crippled and stripped away as they were, there was no way Dream could continue influencing the code of the world he created. No more foolish laws or painful punishments. But he had forgotten that even as the worst, most pathetic admin he had met, Dream had still forged connections to his players. And those connections could be used in more ways than a hijacked teleport or attempted escape.

And two, he had never expected someone to throw everything at trying to kill someone.

They were cruel but most when it came down to it were cowards. They would rather flee their punishment or were lost to the pain they had inflicted in others. He had underestimated Dream's cruelty.

There was the sharp hiss and crackling explosion of a creeper but Xisuma had already broken into a sprint. Doc was fine, he saw that on first glance, shrouded in glowing white and ready to explode. Perfectly healthy.

Dream's target had been the child.

He was screaming, only half awake. If it had been any other moment, it would have been safe but Dream's code, as glitched as he was, reacted rather explosively with the teleport. A teleport that had been locked to keep him out.

The child flickered, solid one moment, and present the next, code errors beginning to flicker. Xisuma dropped to his knees next to him, scrambling to pull up his codes.

"What's going on?" Doc said, his voice beginning to fade out. It strengthened as he turned voice chat on, blaring from Xisuma's comm. "What is he doing? I can't-"

Explode. The clinical part of Xisuma's mind filed that information away easily, Doc needed to head to his bunker area. It wasn't good for him to gather up the energy for an explosion and then for nothing to happen. The energy had nowhere to go and it was extremely unhealthy.

An automatic reaction, the creeper side reacting to an enemy. But he couldn't explode, not without hurting the kid as well.

“I don’t know what he’s doing.” Xisuma said, his voice harsh as he rushed through the coding, repressing errors where he could.

Rough laughter crackled through the air. “You might have torn apart my server but I’ll kill him first.” Dream vowed, his voice seemed to come from the glitched coding. Xisuma forced himself to work faster.

He had gone to far lengths to dismantle Dream’s ability to code but he forgot that on some level, even the worst admins knew the codes of their players and maintained their connection until the player’s connection was broken. They had to, it let them notice when glitches occurred or prevent the spread of viruses. In a normal server, it was how they would have changed server rules that effected players. In this state, Dream wasn’t trying to code. He was trying to brute force as much damage as possible.

And Xisuma didn’t have his level of familiarity and with the kid unconscious, there was no way to switch his server allegiance so that he did. The ground began to crack apart beneath him as he rushed to save the kid's life.

It took three weeks to break Tommy’s connection to this server. And Tommy didn’t even switch server allegiances until he responded to Xisuma’s verbal offer of safety.

He was trying to do what he did then in a matter of minutes while also trying to keep that kid’s code from glitching.

“Tell Tommy it’s your fault.” Dream jeered.

“I’ll tell him nothing.” Xisuma snarled. Grian was trying to pull Dream away, but had to be careful to to damage the kid with a careless swipe of the claws.

Xisuma wanted this admin dead. He wanted to rip him apart. How could he do this to one of his charges? Rip him apart, use the familiarity that was meant for good and protection, to destroy him? Everytime Xisuma pushed him out, he broke in another way.

The kid’s health began to drop. His screams began to trickle away.

If this worked, his coding would become as messed up as Dream’s. He could force a permakill, ignoring the trauma it would cause and the work to revive shredded code.

Glowing blue hands appeared next to his. “We have an idea.” Cub, nodding to Scar, who looked grim. Both of them were hard to look at, not for the bright blue, but for the angry whispering that appeared in his head. The vex were angry and not hiding it any longer.

The wheeze of laughter. Xisuma stared down at the code beneath him. “How?” He asked. While Scar and Cub were masters of magic and he had seen their skill with memories, this was code. Neither had shown much interest in working with code before.

“The server ties come from player allegiance, right?” Cub said. It was common knowledge, the final step to a player joining a server was verbal agreement or acknowledgement. It had

always made Xisuma glow when his players made the declaration. “We’ll brute force it. Strip out the allegiance ties from his memory and his coding will reject the ties and an admin.”

Wary silence from the glitched coding. Xisuma stayed focused on his work but he couldn’t help but turn the possibility over in his mind.

“That would strip out... everything.” He said, not sure if he was horrified by the thought. This was far different from a slight adjustment for player comfort or the vex playing temporary pranks. Different from deals.

They would have to strip out everything related to the server. Any memories of allegiance, of the admin. Any happy memories, as little as they likely were, would be tainted by incomplete information.

But it would work, he knew as soon as he heard it that it would work. With the memories stripped out, his coding would completely reject the server ties that Dream was exploiting. It would be far easier to strip out the rotten code and fix the remainder once the kid’s stopped recognizing them as legitimate server coding. And the glitch knew it too because it redoubled its efforts to get in as much damage as possible, knowing it’s time was running out.

Because Xisuma couldn’t make any other choice. Tearing apart the glitch would hurt the kid. It would take far too much time, even with his power, to carefully detangle the coding. Even the touch of the void was more likely to trap the kid too, primed for prisoners as it was.

Perhaps Grian- no, Watchers weren’t made for this kind of delicate work. Doc might have been able to fix this, with his cleverness at using glitches and exploits, but he was back on Hermitcraft. There was no way Xisuma could stop his work for even a moment to bring him back.

But that didn’t mean he was going to enjoy this. “Do it.” Xisuma whispered quietly. Because at least the kid would be alive to see what came next. And the admin would be dead. Xisuma would rather carry the guilt then condemn the kid.

There was a flare of blue, both Vex reaching for the kid’s head. His screams cut off with a sharp gasp and for one moment, his eyes flew open. Unseeing, they glowed with the same light blue that Cub’s and Scar’s did.

Xisuma turned away, hunching back over his work. Stripping away Dream’s attempts to hurt the child, trying to ease the pain he was likely feeling.

It seemed to take far too long still and for a heartbeat he did not have, Xisuma was worried that he miscalculated. That Scar’s and Cub’s powers over memory wouldn’t be enough to fix this. His actions would just add extra agony to the process he was trying to save him from.

But then the kid suddenly relaxed, eyes closing again. Under his hands, coding started to swirl and he could see the server ties begin to snap. Dream let out a howl of rage but Xisuma set upon the weakness with a vengeance, beginning to strip him away now that he couldn’t sink his claws deeper into the kid, so much of his natural coding ability was cut off already.

All he could do was try to brute force and make the code glitch by spreading his own shredded coding. And that was far easier to handle.

As he worked, he whispered a silent apology to the kid. Next time, he would make sure there wasn't a next time.

Xisuma kept working long after Scar had tipped over and Cub had slumped back, resting on the ground. Long after the wretched creature's coding had been ripped out and thrown as deep into the void as he could manage. There was so much work to be done. He had to ease the pain and induce regeneration as much as he could and fix the glitched and the horrific coding scars left from the past admin abuse-

Warm hands wrapped around his, guiding them away. "You're done." Keralis told him forcefully, holding his hands close. "Come on. We're packing up and going home."

"I have to finish." Xisuma murmured. There was still so much to be done. Maybe if he was quick, he could salvage more of the memory coding.

"You're done." Keralis told him gently. He nodded at the kid. "He'll live, he's not in any pain or glitched, and we'll take him back with us. You can fix him more Shashwammy, but not until you sleep and get something to eat."

"I could-"

"No." Keralis said firmly. Xisuma slumped a little. "Now, let's take him home."

And so they did.

"Okay, not surprised." Tommy grumbled. If there was any bitch that would do something so petty, it would be Dream. Motherfucker. Green bitch. He was dead. "But his memories-"

"Sounds pretty abysmal, big T." Tubbo said. He poked his head back into the room, his hands slipping in his pockets as he smirked at Tommy. "But Xisuma's a bad storyteller, I didn't lose everything."

"You didn't?" Tommy said doubtfully. It was still weird hearing Tubbo refer to Xisuma so casually, like he knew him.

"Well, I lost a lot." Tubbo said and there was something bittersweet in his shrug. "But I remember little clips of things. Sitting on a bench with you. The bandannas. Bits and pieces of- I think I was a spy? At some point? Just, everything about where I was and the admin in general has been stripped out."

"If you want." Xisuma offered. "The danger had likely passed and you can show him videos or picture to jog his memories. Stories may work too."

"Oh, yeah. I want blackmail. All the blackmail." Tubbo said. Tommy spluttered. He wasn't giving Tubbo blackmail on him! "Let's go to my bee apiary."

“My bee apiary.” Xisuma corrected with a sigh.

“Mine now.” Tubbo grinned. “I join your server, I take your bees.”

“You joined the server?” Tommy interrupted, his voice jumping a bit. Why would Tubbo do that? It wasn’t safe here! They were supposed to run away together, not stay!

“Yeah?” Tubbo said, tilting his head before brushing his raggedy curls out of his eyes. “It made sense. It’s cool here, I get free stuff and to scam people. They taught me a lot of cool stuff while you were passed out too! Plus, you’re here.”

“What?” Tommy said dumbly, staring at Tubbo. Right. He forgot. He technically, despite not knowing what he was getting himself into, was a player of Hermitcraft.

He scratched around the base of a horn with an awkward smile, shifting back and forth. “I’m not joining another server that doesn’t have you. I lost- so much of our history already. I want to make new stories. I’d ask if that was fine with you, big T, but it’s happening anyways so prepare yourself.”

“Fine.” Tommy said, rolling his eyes. But there was a tinge of affection to the motion. Tubbo laughed.

“We’re gonna cause so much chaos, but you didn’t hear it from me, Xisuma.” He said, blinking innocently at the admin. Xisuma sighed, shaking his head, but didn’t say no. “I even got you your music discs! I don’t have a bench yet, but I thought we could build it together.”

“Sounds good.” Tommy said. Okay, Tommy thought, watching Tubbo with a bittersweet smile. Maybe he would give Tubbo some blackmail. As enrichment. A little treat.

“It’s good to see you accepting care.” Xisuma whispered.

“I’m going to bite you.” Tommy whispered back.

Chapter End Notes

And that’s the truth! Y’all really thought Xisuma had did that on purpose, right?

(Well. If he was telling the truth to Tommy.)

Looking Towards Someday

Chapter Notes

Tommy? Stressed
Xisuma? Vibing
Grian? Living his best life
False? Having a great time
Doc? Being cool
Zedaph? Dying

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“His jaw and throat are fine. He’ll just have to rest it for a while. Regen potions will help but make sure he doesn’t drink them too fast.” Doc said finally. Tommy grimaced, rubbing his throat. Fucking finally. It felt like they had been poking and prodding him for hours.

“I finished the tea too!” Grian announced, walking in and waving a mug. He faltered, pulling back before he could dump it on the floor by accident. He was awfully cheery for someone who had to be corralled out of the room by Xisuma to go make tea before he flattened Tommy back into the nest and refused to let him up again. “I even added some honey I stole from Xisuma.”

Tommy couldn’t help the slight panic that crawled up his spine, looking at the heavily armed figure that was standing next to his seat. Wouldn’t that make Xisuma mad? It was stolen, and used for Tommy at that. It wouldn’t be fair if the other took it out on him.

“Grian, at least ask.” Xisuma said with a sigh, shaking his head. “I would have given it to you.”

“Theft makes it taste better, everyone knows that!” Grian singsonged, pressing a warm mug into Tommy’s hands. Tommy sniffed at it cautiously, hesitating over if he should take a sip..

It didn’t smell like potions but that didn’t mean it was safe. Honey could cover up a lot of sins at the end of the day. He had learned a lot from Wilbur about tricks to masking taste and while honey was a pain in the ass to get, it was by far the best. If it was a few weeks ago, he wouldn’t have even thought about taking a sip.

Fuck, weeks. It felt like such a long and short period of time. In just weeks, he had hopped to another server, got stuck with these psychos, got back, and then the Dream SMP was gone and Dream was dead. Period. He shouldn’t even think about drinking this. It was insanely risky.

But on the other hand, if they were going to give him yet another potion, would it matter if he didn’t drink this shit? They’d proven they didn’t give a fuck about holding him down. And

his throat really did hurt, he had a glass of water earlier but he couldn't drink anything while Doc checked him over which was stupid as fuck.

"That would be good for his throat." Doc said. Grian preened and Tommy shrugged, slowly taking a sip.

He waited for the tang of poison or maybe a hint of overly syrupy sweetness of weakness but it was... good.

It didn't taste like any tea he had before, always bitter and setting his teeth on edge. He had a habit of adding tons of sugar to make it taste better.

It was warm and a little bit sour but in like, a good way? And he could taste the honey and fuck, Grian was right. Stolen honey really did taste better because that honey was good. And it felt so good on his raw throat that he took a second sip without thinking about it. Tommy swallowed hard before setting the mug down on one of the little side tables. He'd see if he was poisoned in an hour.

Zedaph breathed a sigh of relief. "That's good, I was worried there could have been more long term damage." He said. "You shouldn't do that again, hatchling. You're not ready for it."

Tommy stuck his tongue out at him, annoyed that all that got was an amused look from Zedaph. Fucker. They had given him another dose of weakness when he tried to bite Doc and everything still felt a bit too heavy.

This was bullshit. He finally had Tubbo back but then they split him up when it was time for his medical check up or some shit like that. And when he had justifiably complained, Xisuma had pointed out that the appointment would be boring for Big T, and a distraction for Doc. Tubbo had been reluctant but promised that he and Keralis wouldn't be far.

Still, Tommy kept glancing towards the door.

Even with Tubbo supporting Xisuma's story, he didn't like that the fuckers had wiped most of Tubbo's memories. And now, Tubbo had gone ahead and joined them too.

"What happened?" Grian said, practically hovering over them. "He's too young to manifest his breath, even in a case where he had one. It should have been at least a decade before it appeared, after everything else settled."

Tommy frowned. A decade? Why did that sound so off to him? There was something wrong about that, but he couldn't think of why.

"Stress, most likely." False interjected. She was cool. Badass in pvp and could bring fire which was fucking sick, but Tommy was still pissed at her even if the fire breathing was very cool. "He was attacked and none of his flight were around. That's the kind of thing that speeds up defensive manifestation as a last ditch scenario, I would know."

She shrugged and blew out fire sparks. Tommy watched in envy. Fuck, that was cool. Zedaph sigh, reaching out and patting her shoulder.

“I guess I’m the odd one out, waiting until the reasonable age to develop.” He sniffed. The facade didn’t last long before he laughed. “It’ll need to be locked for now.”

“No.”

Zedaph made a quizzical noise, staring at Tommy. Tommy glared back, folding his arms.

“You aren’t touching my code.” He snarled. The last fucker he had truly trusted to touch his code had fucking blocked it. Xisuma had done- some kind of shit. He had to have done something to it. That was the only thing that would explain all the weird definitely not feelings Tommy had towards this place.

But what was supposed to be intimidating just got Zedaph’s face to soften into pitying understanding. “I know the thought of it made you nervous after that man abused your trust.” He said. “Trust me! I’d hate it too!”

“I’m saying no.” Tommy said, hunching inward and glancing around. Like he was waiting for Xisuma to step forward and force a hack into his coding. He wouldn’t let him fuck around with it. That was his coding.

“Tommy, it’s for the best.” False pointed out. “If you kept activating it, you could have destroyed your body. Any stress could cause you to activate it again in the future and that’s it. No more replays, buddy.”

Even Grian looked nervous. “Well, I’m not saying anything either way.” He said. “But I think you should really think about it.”

“F off.” Tommy snapped, pulling his arms close to himself. He wasn’t going to let them go poking around in his code. What if they erased his memories too? Then he would be completely defenseless and he wouldn’t be able to protect any of his friends.

Fuck, he hoped everyone was doing alright. Fundy was apparently in another server controlled by the hermits and everyone was apparently going to court? Which sounded pretty fake to him. Everyone knows that court was just a funny way to drag out punishments.

“Tommy-“ Doc began.

“Enough.” Xisuma said. Tommy flinched back, certain the admin would reach for him and tear open his code. The dark mask met his eyes for a moment before Xisuma looked away. Ha, bitch. “If Tommy doesn’t want me to access his coding, we can wait for now.”

“What?” Tommy said, surprised. It slipped out without him even meaning to say it.

He thought Xisuma would pull the bluh I’m an admin card again! But instead, he didn’t and even told them to stop?

What was he getting out of this?

“Xisuma, I don’t know if that’s a good idea.” Zedaph said, frowning. “If he is so much as startled by a baby zombie, he could activate it again. Locking it down is the safe option and it

doesn't have to be forever. Just until natural development."

Tommy glared at him. He wasn't some little bitch that would get scared by a baby zombie! He was the biggest of men!

But Xisuma just shook his head again. "He's on rest for now. He'll have one of us on hand to help him. If he asks for it himself, I'll lock the coding. But for now, I'm not going to force it on him."

Tommy couldn't help the slight sigh of relief. He didn't believe Xisuma was telling the truth, in fact, he was certain he wasn't. He was going to have to keep a high guard for the next few days. But at the very least he wasn't going to have to worry about it being forced on him right now.

"The potions are nonnegotiable." Doc said, pulling out a few vials. Tommy was almost unsurprised to see that all were fresh and vibrant, still glowing from the glowstone used in them. "He'll need to take at least one everyday for the next few days. Three per day would be best, take them before every meal."

Fuck, that was one of the things he was kind of jealous about. The Dream SMP hadn't really used fresh potions since the drug van, and even then, nobody used potions casually enough that they had fresh on hand. Or manufactured enough once war broke out. You made your potions in peace time and stuck them into a chest until war broke out again.

If they had the ability to make potions like he had seen from videos of Stress' factory, he was certain that the war for independence would have gone very differently. They would have absolutely crushed Dream for one. But they didn't have it and hell was Doc casually pulling out a fucking dozen potions.

Fucking Prime.

"Eat the rich." He hissed to Grian who burst into wheezing laughter, shaking with the force of it. The reaction of the other hermits wasn't much better. Doc nearly fumbled the next potion vial he pulled out, shoulders shaking with low chuckles. Zedaph saw no need to hide his, laughing loudly as he leaned against the wall, tail gaily wagging back and forth. False just slowly shook her head, snickering.

(He had braced for it but it was still nice to not have to hear that distinctive tea kettle wheeze.)

"Tommy." Xisuma said awkwardly, staring past him. "You can't really say that. Not here."

"Why not?" Tommy challenged. His voice still rasped slightly but he was determined to push forward. "Eat the rich. Tell me that I can't, rich boy."

"Keralis is technically the richest hermit on the server." Zedaph said between wheezes. "By a whoooooole lot."

“I meant what I said.” Tommy said smugly. But also what the fuck, how rich was Keralis that these guys, with full netherite including fucking netherite hoes, fresh potions and cooked food, and mansions were only second best?

“Oh my- he’s going to bite Keralis, isn’t he!” Grian said, nearly doubling over with the force of his laughter. “Tommy, you can’t just say that!”

“If he didn’t want to get bitten, he shouldn’t have been rich. Easy.” Tommy said with the worldly air of someone solving a great problem. There was a soft thump as Grian hit the floor. Without thinking, he reached out and grabbed his mug, taking another sip. Probably not a good idea, but it felt so nice on his throat. “What the f is this anyways?”

“Tea?” False pointed out. “You’ve had tea, right?”

“Of course, I’ve had tea!” Tommy said, bristling. It was the occasional treat before the Dream SMP. Philza had a box of dried teas and sometimes, the hub worlds had tea. “But this is fff-, ugh, go- different. Different stuff. Did you f-ugh poison it or something?”

“My tea making skills aren’t that bad!” Grian complained, still sprawled on the floor.

“You poisoned Mumbo one time.” Zedaph said. Before Tommy could put the mug down, Zedaph has wrapped his hand around Tommy’s hand in the mug, casually preventing him without even looking.

“Okay, first of all.” Grian started, sitting up quickly. “Mumbo asked me to do that. Don’t go putting this on me here.”

“I think when Mumbo asked you to make sure you got the caffeinated tea, he meant grab the tea with the highest caffeine content. Not soup it up with enchants, sugar, and swiftness potions.” Zedaph countered. “He didn’t crash for five days and then slept for two.”

“Details, details.” Grian casually flicked a hand. “At least I didn’t burn my tea.”

“Oh, you-”

While Tommy watched them argue, Doc sighed, standing up. “It’s a fruit tea with lemon.” He remarked to Tommy, watching them argue as well. “We import our tea from one of the modern servers so we have more selection than most.”

Tommy nodded slowly, glancing down at his mug. Imported, huh? That could mean opportunity. After all, if it was imported, there had to be some kind of codework involved. A portal off the server that he could access, bounce to a new one, and use the recall ability on his comm to find the nearest hub portal.

A heavy hand landed on his shoulder, Xsuma leaning down. “Don’t even think about it.” He said softly. Tommy hid a flinch with a sip.

“I wasn’t doing anything, big man.” He defended. There was no reason for Xisuma to be calling him out like this.

“You are not the first to panic and try to use that route while we’re still working through the trauma. I and one or two of the senior hermits handle restocks, and it’s done between seasons. Not during them.” Xisuma said firmly. Tommy glared down at the mug in his hands. “You’ll like it here. I promise, you’ll understand that soon. I’ll let you make your own list on what you want to get for next time.”

“Yeah, kid, no more inter server adventures. As fun as that was, you gave most of the server heart attacks.” False said. If Xisuma’s hand was heavy, hers was positively burning.

Tommy glared at his mug even harder, wishing it would explode. He would like it more if he wasn’t trapped here, he thought bitterly. For all that talk of kindness, they didn’t seem to care about what he wanted at all.

But he’d get out of here. He’d get Tubbo and they’d go far far away. Make their own cool server with good tea and potion factories and full netherite. No one else was needed. If they had imports, if they left the server, there had to be a portal somewhere he could exploit. He tucked that information in his mind, promising himself that he’d find it as soon as he could. There had to be an easy way off this server, or a way to contact Fundy again.

He was going to escape here or his name wasn’t Tommy Danger Kraken Innit!

Xisuma took his silence for agreement. “On that note, since you did well with Doc, I think you can have some time with your friend. I’m sure they missed you quite a bit.”

Tommy frowned, looking up. Tubbo?

A squawk answered him as Xisuma pushed the door open, breaking up Zedaph’s and Grian’s argument. Tommy couldn’t help the wide grin that spread across his face, practically throwing the mug onto the end table. “Henry! My boy!” He said, beaming at the red blur that zoomed in.

He yelped as Henry viciously beat at his head with his wings, heading another thump as Zedaph gave up and joined Grian on the floor. Tommy would have glared at them if he wasn’t trying to protect himself from Henry’s onslaught of fury.

“Wait, no, ffff-, I’m sorry!” He said, trying to gently push Henry away. It was False who came to his rescue, gently grabbing Henry and holding him still so his beak wouldn’t tear Tommy’s shirt. Now, Tommy turned and glared at the two traitors on the floor. “Betrayal.”

“You should have expected that.” Grian said between wheezes. He let out a soft oof when Zedaph’s head hit his stomach. “I mean, what were you expecting? Prof. Beaks is very displeased with me whenever I leave him for too long.”

Tommy huffed at him, turning back to Henry. “He missed you a lot.” False said. “Caused so much trouble- was it Ren’s base he nearly lit on fire or Impulse’s.”

“Tango’s, he nearly knocked a torch into redstone.” Zedaph said, still wheezing faintly. Looking at him, Tommy could see black sparks floating out every time that he laughed. Weirchamper. Absolutely weirchamper.

“He missed you a lot. It saddened him to see you go.” Xisuma said, and wasn’t that rubbing salt into the wound. He couldn’t help the slight wince and flinch, the guilt that welled up in his belly like a heavy stone.

Tommy- look, he knew he was doing the right thing. The hermits had lied to him and he needed to go back home. And they weren’t going to let him. They were going to keep him here until he agreed with their twisted logic and nevermind how everyone else suffered and he still didn’t even know why they were doing this and-

It was bullshit, that’s what it was.

The logical answer to that was that he needed to leave, right away. It was the answer that Tubbo would have told him and he knew that it was the right one. He could stay here and forget about the world he left behind. Shrug and pretend like everything was good and that the hermits were telling the truth when they said they would go and help everyone.

But that meant that he couldn’t take Henry with him. Because it would have been too complicated to do on his own without his hacker client and Xisuma wouldn’t have helped but that didn’t mean it still didn’t hurt when he had to leave. And know that he was going to leave his parrot friend behind, possibly forever. All the logic in the world couldn’t make it feel better.

“I missed him too.” Tommy said and it feels like winning and losing at the same time. He reached out and took Henry from False’s gentle hands, so careful to curl his claws like False’s so they wouldn’t hurt him. This time, he didn’t nip or swat, he just stayed steady in his hands. Warm and chirping and fuck, he missed this. He missed being able to hold Henry and think everything was alright.

(Some days, he wonders if it would have been better if Evil X had never told him. If he could have lived in the dark, never knowing that they were lying through their fucking teeth. But he would have figured it out eventually.

Would he?)

Tommy stroked a finger over Henry’s head. “Yeah, you caused all sorts of trouble, didn’t you? I bet you have fifty more wives than when I saw you last.” Tommy says to him. Henry lets out a squawk that sounds smug to his ears. Yeah, this was his fucking parrot. No other parrot could out cool his parrot. Henry had them beat, hands down. “Pog.”

“I don’t think he calmed down until the new kid came in and distracted him for some reason.” Xisuma said, tilting his head to the side. “That was before you woke up, we were transferring him around bases so he could get cared for while we were... working. Once he hit the base with the new kid, he calmed way down.”

“Tubbo?” Tommy said, confused. Well, that made some sense, he guessed? Maybe Henry sniffed him with his weird bird nose and knew that Tubbo was a friend? He wasn’t sure how birds could sniff people but he knew that Henry could do it. He was just that fucking cool. But Tubbo could encourage the insanity because he was cool like that.

“No, Tubbo came a bit after this, it took a while to stabilize his coding and for him to awaken again. This is the other kid that we got who chose to join us.” Xisuma said. “His name is Ranboo, did you know him well on your server.”

A single heartbeat. Tommy slowly turned to stare full on at Xisuma. Swears. He needed swears so badly right now.

“YOU KIDNAPPED RANBOO-”

Chapter End Notes

Tommy finally found out!

Me and You

Chapter Notes

Homestretch now!

Man, it feels weird finally hitting this point.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Xisuma pulled back slightly, glancing at Grian. “No?” He said uncertainly. “Not unless the standards of kidnapping have changed.”

“Not to my knowledge!” Grian chirped. “But who knows! New standards of crime are being created every day which is why I’ve decided it’s my job to keep up with them!”

“And commit them.” Doc added drily. He ruffled Grian’s hair, making the other laugh.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about!” He said. “I have never once committed a crime on this server or any other! And I’m very hurt and offended that my dear friend would think that I did! You know what? I think I deserve compensation.”

“You’ve been spending too much time with Scar.” Doc replied but didn’t outright say no.

“Why would you-“ Wait fuck. No. They were distracting him again! And he was not going to be having this. They owed him an answer. Tommy scowled. “Did you kidnap the spineless boob boy? How could you?”

Ranboo was... how should Tommy put it? Not diplomatically at all. Ranboo was a pushover. Absolutely spineless. If it wasn’t for Tommy, he would have also been exiled. But you could convince him to do almost anything.

And if you couldn’t, his memory book made a far too easy target. Kind of sucked for him that he had ended up on a messed up server like theirs. But that didn’t mean Tommy was happy that Boob Boy had ended up on even more messed up server where they could be, fuck, he wasn’t sure. Planning something? Definitely.

“Tommy.” Xisuma said, and Tommy almost rolled his eyes. Was this motherfucker trying to scold him? He would like to see him try. “We’ve talked about how you see the worst in people who are trying to help you.”

“This is sounding more and more like a kidnapping situation by the second.” Tommy shot back. Prime, he wished he could swear. He wished he could do anything honestly! But it was a bit intimidating to some people, definitely not him, to see these fuckers and know that they

were fucking stacked and he had pajamas. “What did you do to him? Hit him with a weakness potion? Sick hardcore mode on him?”

“We don’t enjoy doing that to you.” Zedaph cut in. “If it wasn’t for the weakness potion, you wouldn’t be talking right now. You messed yourself up.”

Tommy stuck his tongue out at him. “It was ffff- uncalled for.” He said, scowling even harder when his tongue tripped over the words. Fuck, the moment he got off this server, he was going to swear so much. The hills would ring with the sounds of his swears and players would weep knowing they could not be as artistically crude as he was.

Xisuma sighed. “No, we did not kidnap Ranboo.” He said. “I was tying up loose ends when I found him waiting. Due to council rules, as he is another minor, he’s not held accountable but his placement was up for heavy debate. I asked if he would consider coming back with me and when he agreed, lobbied on the basis that we could accommodate for his memory and already had two of his friends.”

That was- okay it was quite as bad as Tommy thought it was going to be. But it wasn’t that good either.

“Did you seriously kidnap him with the promise of me?” Tommy said, surprised. On one hand, fuck, Ranboo was a sappy bitch going with someone because they had his friends. On the other hand, it made him feel strangely warm. Maybe that was the rage.

“He asked and he said yes. He entered the server and agreed to the admin just like you did.” False pointed out. She flicked Tommy on the nose when he turned to glare at her and he definitely did not fucking squeak, big men don’t squeak. “Why wouldn’t he want to stay with you? You’re a good hatchling.”

“Now, you’re going to say you kidnapped Purpled too.” Tommy said with a huff. His eyes widened when he actually heard Xisuma sigh with disappointment.

“I offered but he had a friend from Hypixel who was in good standing and so sponsored his return to Hypixel.” Xisuma said. He caught Tommy’s considering look immediately. “That wouldn’t work in your case due to your formerly glitched coding. The Admin Counsel would prefer a monitoring process before you enter any major servers.”

“I still don’t know if I believe you that it ever was. Awfully convenient.” Tommy said. They had lied to him before, what did it matter if they lied to him about this? It would be easy as heck for them. He had stayed here because he trusted them on that lie. Who’s to say he was right and they lied?

Grian snorted. “Your coding was absolutely shredded when you got here.” He said. “You were lucky that you didn’t die.”

A pause.

“YOU TOLD ME IT WASN’T THAT BAD.” Henry let out a squawk, fluttering to Tommy’s shoulder and pressing into his cheek. Like the bird knew what was coming and wanted to

protect him.

Almost dying was very different from the minor glitches he had been told about! Tommy's claws tore through the fabric as he sat fully upright, staring at Grian.

Xisuma sighed, looking at Doc who shrugged. "I said you should tell him." Doc said. "He would have preferred the truth."

Tommy looked between them wildly as Xisuma seemed to give up on something, looking at Tommy. "Tommy, the way you got here wasn't meant for humans. Had you not had your hybrid heritage, it likely would have killed you. Suppressed worsened it and even an Ender Dragon struggles with that kind. When you finally crashed, it- it wasn't pretty, that's all I'll say."

Tommy stared at Xisuma. "What?"

No. He had to be lying.

"Pretty much everyone who had a bit of coding sense worked nonstop to keep you alive. Anyone who didn't, rotated in to take care of you while you were sick. It got pretty touch and go at one point." Zedaph replied. He stared at the ceiling, looking a little uncomfortable. "But we kind of agreed to keep it quiet because we were worried you'd freak out if you found out you nearly glitched and died."

Tommy stared at him. "What the-" He choked on the last word. Part of him didn't want to believe it. They were just backtracking to make him feel worse.

"I can show you your code if you want." Grian offered with a wave of the hand. "You can probably still see the patches and areas where we had to fix coding before it unraveled. Whoever threw you into this world is going to be having words from me because wow."

Part of him wanted to but the other part of him revolted at the words. Look at his code? Again? Even if it was to see if they were lying to him, he couldn't help but hesitate. They could do a lot if they saw his code, they could hurt him. They could erase his memory.

He hadn't been looking for anything before though. Back when Xisuma first revealed his code, he was too focused on the block.

And part of him- was worried to have it confirmed. You weren't supposed to come back when your code got torn apart. The effort was just so much. Most admins would prefer to nuke it from orbit rather than allow it to spread any glitchiness to their precious server.

If the hermits were telling the truth, he would owe them big time. Seriously. Dream probably would have been happy if he glitched that badly and well, Tommy couldn't think of many with the serious coding skills it took to fix that.

And then it asked the question of what they would want in return for that. Minor glitch, he could dismiss. Near death? You had to want something for that.

“One moment.” Grian said, taking his silence for a yes. And then the world in front of Tommy flickered and he *saw*.

Code flickering through the little window. His code. Only for a second before there was an armored hand in front of him, blocking his view. “Grian, that’s enough.” Xisuma said. “We agreed to keep it quiet for a reason. This is pushing it too far and you shouldn’t use your ability like that on fellow Hermits.”

“But-“

“We’ll be talking about this.” Xisuma said heavily. Tommy couldn’t bring himself to move. “False and Doc? Could you take Grian for a bit?”

“Sounds good.” False said, taking Grian by the arm and pulling him. The other looked reluctant to go, looking at Tommy but Tommy couldn’t look him in the eyes. There was a soft click as they walked out, closing the door behind them and Tommy let out a low, shuddering sigh, slumping on himself a bit.

He hadn’t caught anything strange but there was something horrifying at the easy, casual way that Grian had just pulled out his code. Without thinking twice about it, he had just casually bared everything that was Tommy to the world. Could- Could these fuckers always do that? Just pull out his code and take a little look see, even when Tommy was conscious?

He didn’t even get a hacking prompt.

What the fuck.

Why had Xisuma even asked to take the block off? Why even bother to say he wouldn’t block Tommy’s freaky purple sparkle attack of manliness? He said that he wanted Tommy’s answer but he didn’t need it at all. He could have just pulled out his code and done it himself. And fuck, that was horrifying. Grian had just pulled out his code. And fuck, he knew that people could do that. People had tried to hack him in 2b2t and someone had blocked his code. Had known Xisuma could probably do that.

But he hadn’t thought of it as being so fucking easy. Fuck.

A warm hand nudged him to the side, Zedaph sitting down next to him. “Let’s invite your friend over.” He said, pressing the mug of tea back into Tommy’s hands. It was still warm. “I think it might be good for you to catch up with him and ask how he is.”

Xisuma didn’t say anything, watching Tommy cautiously. Tommy took a deep breath. No fear. He wasn’t going to show them how deeply afraid that had made him. “Yeah.” He said gruffly. “Yeah, invite him over. I want to make fun of him to his face.”

He was pretty sure his facade worked but neither Xisuma or Zedaph commented if it didn’t. “I’ll get the portal up.” Xisuma said. And Tommy said nothing at all, taking another sip of the tea. Still good.

He had to get out of here.

So, turns out, as sick as they sounded, admin portals were like normal portals, just with a more dramatic sounding building process. Xisuma futzed around in the next room over for an hour or two while Zedaph convinced him to watch more videos of their server wide Tag game which admittedly, were funny. Despite himself, Tommy had let himself relax a little bit. Just a little bit. But that didn't mean he hadn't been excited when the portal was done.

He had to set Henry down in the nest, ignoring his annoyed squawks and activating the sit command. Xisuma said that pets and admin portals were tricky and Tommy didn't want anything happening to his friends.

He had refused Zedaph's help getting up. The weakness potion was mostly gone by now though he still felt slow as he eagerly slipped through the portal. It felt... just like a Nether portal. The colors of the world had smeared like someone slapped their hand on a pile of dye and there was a brief moment of nausea before he was staggering out into the sunlight.

Warm hands caught him by the shoulders. "Careful, don't want you to trip." Someone said normally. Tommy looked up at him, quickly brushing his hands off. Brown floppy hair and pale blue eyes, he looked like none of the hermits Tommy had seen before, especially the strange swirl on his shirt. "I'm Joe, Joe Hills if you want my full name."

"Tommy Danger Kraken Innit." Tommy said loftily. Joe whistled. Yeah, it was a bitchin name. Tommy had picked it out himself and had chosen only the coolest of words to be his middle names. It struck fear in the hearts of those who heard it.

"Solid name. I heard you weren't here to meet me though." He said, waving his head behind him. Tommy looked behind him and took a deep breath.

He would recognize that tall fucker anywhere, even with the other turning away and talking to a woman who was part zombie, judging by the green tint to her skin. A grin sneaked on his face for a moment before he wiped it off, sticking his hands in his pockets as he sauntered closer.

"Ey, Book Boy!" Tommy called, coughing a little at the end because of his traitorous throat. Ranboo looked up, and a tentative smile broke across his face as he stood up straight, absently fixing his tie.

He looked better somehow, Tommy couldn't help but notice. In Dream SMP, Ranboo had looked more and more harried every time he visited. Little holes in his suit jacket stopped getting fixed and dark circles had formed under his eyes. He was constantly looking around like he expected someone to burst out and go for him.

But not anymore. He had gained weight, skeleton frame filling out a bit and cheeks look less gaunt. The eye circles were gone as well. The suit had been carefully patched, looking good as new. As much as Tommy hated to say it, he was definitely looking like he was thriving here.

"Heard you got kidnapped. So not pog." Tommy started with and he couldn't help glancing at the zombie woman, eyes widening a bit when he recognized it was Cleo. She sent him a little

half wave. “Couldn’t you at least try to put up a fight?”

“Well, no? I didn’t really see the point?” Ranboo said and fuck yep, this was his Ranboo. He sounded flustered the exact same way. “I mean, the server contract seemed pretty fair and it was better than getting kicked to yet another server. I mean, at least I think so because I wrote down how awkward the council meeting was.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “It’s about the prin-ci-ple of the matter.” He lectured. Ranboo rolled his eyes, nudging him slightly.

“It’s been pretty good so far, I’ve been staying with Joe and he got me a therapy dog and I got my cats back which is nice!” Ranboo said and his pen started tapping against the book in his hands. “And TFC stopped by, he’s nice, you might see him digging around here! He took me down into the tunnels and I think they go everywhere.”

“They better with how much time he spends mining.” Cleo said but there was a cheery lilt to her smile. “He’s startled me digging into my strip mine.”

Tommy grimaced. He didn’t like mining anymore, not after mining over and over and over getting materials that inevitably were destroyed. Ranboo caught his look, and mistaking it for something else, said, “Do you want to go see one of the temporary dog pens?”

“Fine.” Tommy said with a shrug. He hadn’t seen any dogs in ages. Sapnap had killed off most of them during the pet wars. He thinks Techno might have a few? But, uh, well. “Yeah, that’s good. Give me something to look at.”

Another good joke by Tommy himself! Because fuck, this place was elaborate. Someone had built what looked to be a massive replica of the skeletons in the nether, leading along a neat path.

He could hear a waterfall in the distance and the soft barking of dogs. Ranboo nodded, looking at Cleo. “We’re going to head over there, okay?” He said.

Cleo pursed her lips before nodding. “Alright, but we’ll be nearby in case there’s any trouble.”

Tommy could have jumped for glee. They were free! No hermits hanging over their shoulders! Maybe this was a good opportunity to escape. The hermits wouldn’t be far but Tommy had made do with worse, though last time he had had Fundy and tnt to back him up while he strategically ran in a direction away from the hermits.

Ranboo led him down the path. “Joel’s been showing me some building tips.” He said excitedly. “I’m thinking it would be cool if I could build something like this for my cats!”

Tommy stared at the massive doghouse. Fuck, that amount of wood must have taken a while to gather. “I dunno, it seems like a waste of resources and time to me.” He said finally. On a house that wasn’t even meant for a person. He wouldn’t deny that Henry deserved the world but he deserved being kept alive first and this seemed like a blaring neon sign for people like Sapnap.

“Well, maybe, it would be nice to be able to waste resources like that.” Ranboo said with a shrug, looking down at his book as they walked. Three sets of footsteps crunching down the path. “To just... build something nice. Just for the sake of it being something nice.”

Tommy scoffed. “Then what happens if it gets blown up?” He pointed out. “What’s the point of all the f- effort if it just gets blown up in the end?”

That had been Dream’s favorite ‘lesson’ in exile, the complete psychopath that he was. That resource grinding was a fucking waste of time. All it took was someone bigger and badder than you and then bam, all of it was gone. The only point was to become the biggest and baddest so that no one would ever fuck with you again.

“They don’t do that in Hermitcraft.”

“They’re lying.” Tommy said stubbornly. “No server ever stays peaceful. They just say they are until you get good and sucked in and then you get f- over. Dre-”

He clamped his mouth shut. The Dream he had met had been a lie. “They erased Tubbo’s memory.” He said. They stop by a beach where he could see dogs sleeping or playing amongst beach towels in the sand. Ranboo sighed, leaning heavily against the fence.

“That was an accident.” He pointed out and sometimes, Tommy really hated how passive Ranboo could be. Why couldn’t he get mad! Angry! They had hurt Tubbo.

“They could be lying!”

“I don’t think so. Because if they really wanted to mess with us, they could have done it by now.” Ranboo pointed out. “I don’t remember the meeting but I wrote that the Admin Council didn’t really challenge Xisuma at all. They tore apart Dream SMP and you weren’t there but I was and trust me, that? That I want to forget. We’re registered players now, they already can do whatever they want.”

A dog trotted forward, holding a bone. Ranboo reached down, giving it an affectionate scratch before grabbing the bone and throwing it. The dog let out a cheerful bark, sprinting after it.

“...What are you saying, Boo Boy.”

There was a message there, unheard but obvious. Tommy wasn’t good with people, not like Tubbo and Wilbur were, but he could hear it anyways. He watched Ranboo slump a little, practically draped over the fence and confirming Tommy’s theory that he really didn’t have a spine.

“I don’t think we should leave.” He said. He held up a hand before Tommy could speak. “I know you want to because I wanted to too. There’s something messed up about this place, something I can’t quite put my finger on but it’s wrong. But it might be the best we can get.”

Ah, fuck him. Ranboo, too? “They have power over us, don’t you see that Ranboo?” He said, lowering his voice. He would have been an idiot if he didn’t hear footsteps trailing them. “We

could be free now. Dream's dead. We're out of the SMP. We can go anywhere."

"Where?" Ranboo said. The dog trotted up with the bone again and Ranboo slowly grabbed it and threw it again. Tommy watched it fall. "Where would we go? None of us can make our own server, I don't know any admins, Tubbo's memory is messed up like mine, and we can't go to Hypixel without sponsorship."

"I know admins." Tommy said stubbornly. He coughed, watching two puppies roll in the sand. That was adorable but it didn't lift his mood much. "Look. You in or out, Ranboo."

Ranboo sighed. "If you make it, I'll follow." He said. "But I want it to be known that I think this is a very bad idea."

"That's all I need." Tommy said. Tubbo was a given.

For now, he'd play with the dogs and pretend like he didn't know the hermits were definitely spying on them.

But soon.

He'd blow this popsicle stand.

Chapter End Notes

Tommy really be going through it.

Betrays Long Planned

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was probably just before dawn that Tommy's eyes flew open, the darkness starting to lighten a bit. But he liked to think it was midnight. It was more intimidating that way. All the best things happened at midnight in stories so that's when he decided it was.

He had wanted to wake up earlier. On the Dream SMP, he had been a night owl. When most mornings started with him waking up in the ocean, it had seemed way easier to stop sleeping through the night, even when Dream refused to set the mechanic that would let them speed through the night.

But Hermitcraft had made him lazier. He had luxuriated just a bit too much in his sleep. Instead of waking up and getting stuff done, they kept pushing him to go to bed. And it had been just so easy to fall asleep under blankets that was warm and soft and with a belly full of good food.

Fuck, he had been a moron.

Tommy forced himself to keep still, opening his eyes and peeking out. He could hear Keralis snoring, practically folded into a pretzel at the end of the bed. Right, the good. Xisuma had stayed with Ranboo to check how he was settling in. False and Doc were with Grian and hadn't come back. He wondered if Grian was safe or if the hermits were finally showing their true colors.

He was ninety-five percent sure Keralis wouldn't wake up, the guy had crashed hard when they got back from the visit. But the fucker he was maybe just a smidge worried about was fucking Zedaph.

One arm had been thrown over his back, the other dragon hybrid peacefully snoring away in the blankets. Tommy narrowed his eyes. Or not so peacefully.

Every single time he had woken up during Zedaph's visits to the Omega Tree, Zedaph woke up instantly. They had a sixth sense for when he was getting up and had foiled his attempts to sneak out and get a chance to breath without the clingy fuckers around. It had been kind of nice when he thought these fuckers were maybe actually good people and now it was kind of creepy how Zedaph would wake and push him back to bed.

Right. Time to get crafty. Tommy had been planning this very carefully and in the end had gone for the stupidest choice of solution.

Slowly, painstakingly slowly, he inched his way out of bed. As soon as he was halfway there, he felt Zedaph stir. "What are you doing?" The other mumbled, fumbling to pull him back. Tommy bites down on his lip, cheeks warming in embarrassment.

“Want Henry.” He mumbled, adding a bit of whine to it that would have Techno fold back when the other saw him as family. It worked the same on Zedaph, even in the darkness, he could see him melt a bit. He’d have to sprint if Zedaph tried to stop him.

“Fine, just for a bit.” Zedaph agreed and Tommy had to fight back a cheer when he felt the other pull away. But he forced himself to remain steady, slowly climbing out of bed and trying to pretend like he was tired and sleepy. Tubbo would be so proud of him right now, he just knew it.

Henry was perched on a little enclosure across the room, something intricate and of course, beautiful and made out fence posts and trapdoors. He barely stirred as Tommy scooped him up, pressing him to his chest.

He slid down the wall, carefully maneuvering around his wings and tail, curling up and trying to fight the sleepiness tugging at his eyes. Fucking stupid. He really needed to train himself back to his old sleep schedule, none of these ‘growing child’ bullshit. He wasn’t a child, he was already the biggest of men. But it was hard, the room still blanketed in warm darkness and Henry’s warm weight on his chest.

Or, almost darkness, he thought. As his eyes adjusted, it was actually pretty fucking easy to see. A side effect of his hybrid status, Zedaph had cheerily explained, and yet another thing to keep track of. At least this was useful.

He sat down, keeping his breathing even. Tommy was only looking at one thing anyways. The dim glow of Zedaph’s eyes, the other still awake. And watching him. He had to fight the urge to growl, still pissed that the other was awake. He didn’t need a night time babysitter and it was another addition to the long list of why he wanted to leave.

But if he growled, Zedaph would know. And then he’d get dragged back into the nest and right back to square one and he didn’t want that at all.

Instead, Tommy started to hum. Nice and soft and he ignored the ache in his chest. Back when they were family, Wilbur used to hum to him like this when he was having trouble sleeping. Even when he complained, Wilbur said he was just practicing his music around him, a complete coincidence.

Looking back, the fucker absolutely knew what he was doing. Tommy couldn’t help but fall asleep every time Wilbur hummed to him for a bit. There was something strangely lulling about it. It had been nice. To listen to the soft music and let it carry him away into sleep. And hopefully, Zedaph would get tricked by it too.

He picked a sweet tune, simple and one of the few he still remembered. Wilbur had stopped doing it during the war for independence, complaining that he had too much work and Tommy was old enough to sleep on his own. Tommy had- maybe hoped a little that after, Wilbur would start doing it again. And then the election had come.

He had to fight to keep the tune light and cheery, praying it would work as he stroked Henry’s adorable feathers. Slow. Steady. Even. And he waited, watching Zedaph in the darkness to see who would fold first.

Slowly, far too slowly.

Those glowing eyes closed.

Tommy could have cheered. He nearly did before clamping his mouth shut and pressing his hand over it. He wasn't going to fuck this up now, not while he was so close to getting it right this time.

Slowly, he lifted Henry back onto his perch, easing himself up from his seat. Henry cooed at him sleeping and Tommy tried to shush him quietly, activating the sit command to make sure the sleepy bird stayed.

Crossing the floor to the door felt like it took a million minutes as he eased one foot forward and then the next, trying to make sure his tail didn't scrape the floor. If he fucked this up now, he would throw a fucking fit.

A scrape. Tommy froze, cursing his tail as he checked the bed. Keralis rolled over, mumbling softly in his sleep. He stayed still, watching the other and hoping that they didn't wake up.

Nothing. He repressed a relieved sigh, reaching for the door. He had to do this even slower, the door wasn't cared for like the rest, and creaked slightly. It felt like torture to ever so quietly is it open until it was big enough to squeeze out of.

But with a quiet noise, he was free. Standing in a dimly lit hallway outside the warm nest and Tommy didn't care how his instincts screamed, this was incredible. He had to force himself to gently pull the door close, hoping the soft click didn't wake them.

And now he had at least an hour before they woke up for real and realized he was gone!
Plenty of time!

And a pretty fucking good plan if he did say so himself. Well, an okay plan. He didn't have Ranboo yet, the other stupidly declining his hushed hidden offer.

Ranbitch would follow him with Tubbo if he escaped but didn't want to leave now which was plain stupid if you asked Tommy. But as the bigger man, he wasn't going to up and kidnap him!

And he couldn't exactly invite Tubbo. Xisuma had rudely declined him asking to see Tubbo, saying that he was tired and blah blah blah, would see Tubbo tomorrow which was exceedingly stupid. So Tommy would just have to escape on his own and bring the others with him later!

Which, yeah. He could handle it. Easy. Tommy tiptoed down the hallways, trying to find the way out. Stupid portals. If they had walked him out, he would have known exactly where to go but noooooo. And now he had to take the slow way, checking every door because it could be the way out with how the hermits built their building.

As he moved further and further away, he could feel the pet bond start to tug. Tommy ignored it with gritted teeth. Henry would be fine, he asked Ranboo to take care of them until his epic rescue mission. That would make sure none of the hermits could hurt him.

He finally came to a little two block hole, half hidden down one of the side corridors and this time Tommy does quietly cheer. “F yeah.” He mumbled, creeping closer.

He could see moonlight shining through the crack, the remnants of when someone decided they didn’t want to go to the front door. Or maybe this was the front door and it was some freaky decoration choice Tommy didn’t understand. What was wrong with carving out a dirt hut? Nothing.

“F- yeah.” He mumbled. He definitely wouldn’t be missing not being able to curse. It was like one last big fuck you. He couldn’t be slow anymore, Tommy practically sprinted out of the hole, exulting in the feel of moonlight against his skin.

No stupid hardcore bullshit! No annoying hermits! He was well and truly free! He still needed to make his way out because holy fuck Keralis’ base was way bigger than he had been expecting. An entire city, like the ones he had seen in pictures of modern servers.

In his chest, the pet bond tugged, hard. And Tommy froze, his blood running cold. He wouldn’t have been able to hear it before, not without the newly enhanced hearing.

In the distance, he could hear squawking. Very familiar squawking. For a moment, he almost rushed back, terrified they were lashing out at Henry. But the squawks didn’t sound right.

He had seen enough pets die to have the sound engraved in his brain. Panicked, yes but not in pain. He knew the sound of pain far too well. This was panic, completely and utterly, and Tommy knew exactly why.

He had trusted Henry. The little bird had been a comfort and a reason he felt so guilty leaving the first time. He had fed him, risked his life to save him, confided in him all of his stress and fear. And now his little pet was betraying him to the hermits? This was the ultimate betrayal and Tommy could almost feel his heart break as he took off in a sprint.

It took everything he had to repress the pain back down. If he faltered for even a moment, he’d be caught again and there would be no way he’d get a try at this method. Delays were unacceptable, he wanted off this server yesterday.

Tommy dodged a lamppost, mind racing a mile a second. He had maybe a few minutes before they realized he wasn’t still in the base, the fucker was huge but Zedaph at the very least was fast. He had seen the other boosting around with his wings and how fast the hermits could run with elytra so Keralis was fast as well.

Turn down the next street.

Hopefully, they’d delay calling Xisuma out of fear of being punished. The longer they delayed, the farther he could get before the admin realized where he was going. He didn’t want any freaky code magic or admin teleporting interrupting this, thank you very much. Fuck, he wished he still had the tnt with him.

(Fucking hell, the man built buses? Did he not have any worries about war at all? He had thought the other bases were ridiculous but this took it to another level.)

His goal was straight forward, elegant, and in his mind, praiseworthy. The hermits had been showing him so many videos of their adventures, to distract him from their probably nefarious deeds. But Tommy had worked it out how to use it to his advantage! Because one of the videos Scar had shown him was his first day on the server.

It was ages ago, but Tommy still vaguely remembered the spawn area. And if they got onto the server there, that meant there had to be some way off. Some little entrance hidden in the code that he could use as an exit. He just had to make his way there, access the coding, and boom, free.

Then all he would do was reach out to some of the admins he knew before Dream SMP, vaguely, and move onto a different server and get rid of Xisuma's claim! Or maybe he'd make his own server, a place just for him and Tubbo and mayyybeee Ranboo. Probably. He wouldn't just leave the guy here.

But that meant making it out of this fucking city.

Tommy skirted the edge of the buildings, trying to stay in the shadows and keeping his eyes on the sky. He couldn't hear the crackle pop of fireworks powering elytra yet. Did that mean they weren't chasing him? Did they finally decide to leave him alone?

He dove under the car just in time as a shadow drifted over the street, gliding from one building to another. Tommy bit his lip to avoid fake swearing. Oh, those crafty bitches. They knew he'd be listening for them, so they were gliding from building to building instead.

No clue who it was though, they were way too high up for him to tell. Probably Zedaph or Keralis because surely, the other hermits wouldn't be here yet. They'd still be asleep and hopefully too asleep to notice any comm messages.

Tommy snuck out from under the car, trotting down the streets. He decked from shadow to shadow, keeping his head on a swivel. He should have tried to craft a weapon before he left, it would have been really handy right about now.

He felt terrifyingly vulnerable, out in the open, with nothing in his inventory. He didn't even have armor because they refused to give him anything out then soft clothing or pajamas. Tommy scowled, eying a bush and wondering if getting a big stick to hit them with would be worth it.

Reluctantly, he discarded the idea. Keralis probably had this whole city memorized or some bullshit like that. He wouldn't put it past him to know that that one bush had been broken and put the pieces together. But fuck, destroying something would feel so satisfying right now. At least if he stayed out of sight, it couldn't get worse.

The skies opened up, rain pouring down. Tommy decided he really fucking hated this server.

He shivered, wings wrapping around himself. The rain was fucking freezing. And with the clouds, came new shadows. Keralis' city was well lit up but now, he could hear the soft hissing of mobs spawning. Double fuck.

He picked up the pace, booking it towards where was pretty sure was the ocean. There was no chance that that rain was natural. Tommy had lived on 2b2t, he had seen what people could do with weather commands.

Fucking lightning.

He hopped a fence when he heard voices, the soft gleam of comms breaking through the shadows. Tommy pressed himself against the wall of a building, heart leaping into his throat. Why did this have to be so fucking difficult? Why couldn't they just let him go?

"I know- bad behavior- but- worried about him." Was that Grian? Tommy slowly started backing away. He was so close to the ocean that he could smell the salt in the air. Grian had been fast as fuck when he tackled him before.

"Oh, you know how it is. We'll get him back." Scar's voice came through clearer, they were getting closer. "Don't you fret."

Oh no, he fucking wouldn't. Tommy slipped around the other side. He'd have to backtrack a little but he was so so close now. It wasn't worth getting caught like a moron because he decided to slip past, even if it would feel good to rub it in their faces.

This was for Tubbo and Ranboo, he reminded himself. For them. He was going to escape and protect them.

But it was getting harder and harder to move forward. Every street he turned down had a hermit pair searching, forcing him to backtrack at multiple points. At one point, he had to jump on top of a tree and listen to Iskall and Keralis pass below him. With every forced exit, his temper grew shorter and shorter.

It was hard as he got colder and colder. His hands were starting to go numb and cramping, his wings drooping under the freezing cold rain.

But he was making it! Slowly, but surely. He could see the ocean through the buildings now. Just three little logs and he'd be cruising. Maybe he wouldn't! The ocean was his bitch, he could just get a dolphin!

Or not for totally unrelated reasons. But he could do this. His tail whipped past his legs in excitement as he snuck through the final road to the ocean.

There was a soft pinging sound and something in his chest yanked hard. Tommy doubled over with a gasp, hearing a popping sound in the air. Doubled over, wheezing with pain, he could see a flash of scarlet in the air.

Henry took one look at him and started screeching. Tommy went to grab the bird, but he started hopping backwards, refusing to be grabbed. "No- f- shush-" He could hear yelling and every fear response he had kicked on.

Tommy bolted.

Which helped for all of a second before Henry's screeching got louder again and Tommy realized that someone had forced the teleport mechanism on. And worse, when he reached for the sit command, he couldn't access it anymore. They took it all away.

A perfect built in neon sign just for him.

Desperate, he veered towards the ocean. He didn't want to but it would be harder for them to follow if he was swimming and fuck, he just didn't want to be head anymore. Tommy couldn't help the startled noise as he hit freezing cold water, chilling his already chilled limbs to the bone.

"Oh, it just had to be the ocean."

Burning hot hands grabbed his shoulders.

Tommy fought like a wildcat, scratching and biting at everything he could reach. Another set of hands joined the first, no less warm, but even stronger. Tommy got a lucky kick to the stomach, hearing them double over wheezing.

"Pulse you okay-"

Tommy head butted him in the face, throwing himself back to the shore. He made it five feet before eating dirt, someone tackling him to the ground. Burning heat spread over his back as Tommy clawed at the mud. "Chill, well, not that chill. Why did it have to be rain?" The person sitting on him complained. He twisted, catching a feral grin and scarlet eyes. Tango.

"Because Xisuma wants you to suffer." The other joked and Tommy hissed as he heard the other slog out of the water. Tommy tried to throw himself free again. Henry's squawks were beginning to quiet but Tommy refused to quit. If they were going to capture him, he was going down swinging.

"I don't want any of my players to suffer." Tommy bared his teeth at that familiar voice. There was the soft crackle of a glass vial breaking and he let out a hiss as his muscles went limp.

"Beach!" He snarled. It wasn't enough but it made him feel better. He was freezing, well, not so freezing now. Tango was incredibly warm and he could hear steam hissing even through the rain.

"Found the kid." Tango said, his grin far too cheery. "Tried to go ocean diving in the rain."

A soft sigh. Tommy snapped at the hand that reached for him. "I know where he was going to go." Xisuma said and Tommy refused to freeze. "Move, Tango. I need to discuss something with him."

If it wasn't for the weakness potion, he would kick their ass, Tommy thought mulishly. But with the weakness potion, the violet sparks weren't coming. A cold gauntlet wrapped around his arm and the world twisted.

They landed on an island, Xisuma catching Tommy before he could hit the ground. Tommy tried weakly to push him away, glaring. “Let go of me!” He snapped.

“Do you recognize this place?”

Tommy looked around, brow furrowing. Did he- Oh. Oh. He did recognize this place. The place where the server began. He could go now.

He tried to reach for the code command, the lingering portal that should be here but there was nothing. Nothing but a tiny sandy island, wind lashing the waves into a frenzy.

“There is no way to go.” Xisuma said, ignoring Tommy spitting fake swears at him. “Nothing to do. I told you, I keep this server safe and that includes the hermits from themselves. There are no exits I don’t control. Evil X is in a place he can’t reach you. You’re not leaving Tommy, and I know you don’t understand now, but you will someday.”

“Never.” Tommy spat.

“That’s what I said once.”

Chapter End Notes

Ahahahhaha, AND YOU LOVED HENRY

Epilogue (An Ending of Sorts)

Chapter Notes

It's strange now to come to an ending. But I think it's time. If you've been following my works, by now you probably know that I like an open ending. Tommy's story isn't done yet but the one I wanted to tell is.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy leaned back on the bench, glaring up at the sky. Even the sweet sounds of Mellohi couldn't soothe him now.

"In my defense, I did tell you that was a bad idea." Mumbo said. He was still brushing the soot off of his suit. "I did note how though the redstone can cause a chain reaction, it's not much of a, well, explosive one."

"Hush, it was fine." Tommy said. It was not fine.

He had been here for three weeks from his attempt at the spawn point at this point and had still made no progress in leaving. Worse, none of the hermits hadn't seemed to care that he did. The worse he got was getting scolded as they carried him back to Keralis'.

Try to light up the shopping district again with tnt? Xisuma kept an eye on his inventory and would take things out of it that he wasn't 'allowed' to have.

Protest he wasn't a baby and Xisuma shouldn't touch his inventory? Doc told him it was justified by how he burned himself lighting some of the tnt up. But he had managed to keep his flint and steel, only to find that Hermitcraft didn't have fire spread.

Apparently he'd get tnt privileges back if he was good. Which, fuck that.

He built statues out of cobblestone and refused to do any fancy bullshit like 'texturing' them? The hermits would wince when they saw them but didn't do anything (Ren built a goddamn display case around his).

He had annoyed them, attacked them, and tried to destroy as much as he could. And none of the hermits had done anything yet and it was putting Tommy on edge. Because surely, this weird goodwill couldn't go that far.

At some point, they'd either kick him out or lash out. And Tommy wanted the former so much.

He had even quizzed Tubbo and Ranboo to see if the others were taking the punishments and they had given him weird looks! Like he was the crazy guy here. And he didn't see any

injuries and jumpiness from them.

But for his latest attempt, Tommy had gone big. He had ruined one of Mumbo's redstone inventions and tried to use it to make a big ass crater. And it worked. At first. And then there was just a lot of redstone dust everywhere.

When he heard Grian screaming, he thought that he had finally done it. And then he realized the other was laughing. And Mumbo had just shook his head and remarked that he would be helping him fix that later.

(And Tommy had refused to do that before to make them angry but that just made them even more overbearing and he wasn't able to leave the nest for days while they smothered him and talked about grounding him like he was a child.)

Needless to say, he was really frustrated at this point.

"I still think you should have waited for the pressure to build more." Tubbo said, still flopped over the jukebox. He had laid there and refused to move after they had settled at a bench. "Much more of a bigger explosion."

A bench, not the bench because Tommy refused to call it that. Even if the hermits had presented it to them after Ranboo had let the news about their bench being gone slip.

It was big and fancy while theirs had been small and just... right. It was odd in the little details. Bigger where their bench had been smaller and Tommy hated it and like it because it was meant for the hermits to sit there with him, invading a space that he had only opened to a handful of people.

There were lanterns and sunflowers around and even the view was different. A hill overlooking the shopping district. He could see some of the hermits in and out of the shops, a reminding presence that if he ran now, he wouldn't get far.

It was nice in a strange way but he hated it anyway.

"Please do not." Ranboo said with a wince, unfairly relaxed about this. He pet his cats that were laying around him and Tommy didn't even have the energy to roll his eyes. Ranboo had taken to Hermitcraft like a duck to water, believing their lies.

And neither had much cared about his attempts to escape.

"Would've worked if Mumbo hadn't tackled me." Tommy sniped. Mumbo spluttered. It was true! He had it all under control, no problems here.

"If I hadn't tackled you, the shrapnel would have taken your head off!" Mumbo protested. Tommy sniffed in derision.

"I'm built different, you wouldn't understand." He said, making Tubbo wheeze.

"Built different doesn't affect shrapnel." He said slowly and Tommy sighed, shaking his head. "Zedaph did tell you your scales weren't ready yet."

“He doesn’t know what he’s talking about, I’m just built different.” Tommy dismissed. It’s not like it would have done much, he just would have been forced into yet another doctor’s appointment. He was finally off of his health potion regime and health lock gone.

He would happily go without having to eat too sweet oatmeal again, knowing they were spiking his food with drugs. He didn’t trust they wouldn’t escalate.

“I’m going to have to keep that in mind.” Grian said, still chirping under his breath. His way of laughing. “That was quite the prank! It’ll be perfect for next season.”

“Woah, woah, woah.” Tommy said, pushing himself up. What was that supposed to mean? “What about next season?”

“Xisuma is going to announce it soon, we’re changing worlds again!” Grian said, but his eyes were dark. He hated Tommy’s attempts the most. Tommy inhaled sharply. “We’ve shown you the videos, most of us are good with where our projects are at and bored. It’s time for us to go.”

“Oh this’ll be sick!” Tubbo cheered, pushing Ranboo over. The cats scattered.

He did remember that. He had been jealous when he had seen the videos of the big server moves. Moving servers was hard, let alone creating an entirely new one. Why would anyone want to do that?

And yet, the hermits did.

And now they were taking them with them.

“With us?” Tommy said slowly. Like maybe if he asked right, Grian would laugh and say no. That it was time for them to leave.

“Of course.” Tommy didn’t even flinch, looking up at Xisuma who sat down on the free space of the bench. “You’re part of the group now. Of course you would come along.”

“I want to leave.”

Grian glossed right over his words. “Maybe since we’ll have more room, we can see about you guys doing your own projects. Small ones connected to ours but it’s a good start!”

Ranboo perked up because he is a dumb bitch. “I have some ideas written down if you want to see.” He said. “I can show you!”

“I have a bomb shelter plan! For reasons.”

Tommy glared at Xisuma while Mumbo and Grian looked over Ranboo and Tubbo’s plans. “I’m not staying with you.” He challenged. “I’ll make the worst project ever. So ugly. You’ll cry when you see it and regret it and let me go. No texturing. All the cobble.”

“I look forward to seeing what you make.” Xisuma said, leaning against him.

And Tommy hated how that made him feel warm.

Chapter End Notes

I think I'll come back to this at some point! But I admit, I like this ending more than the others I've toyed with. It tells the story I want to tell, and I'm happy with it. I wanted to explore someone joining a server that's better in some ways, but deeply messed up in others. The way beliefs can warp. Boiling a frog until it's trapped.

Will Tommy escape? Or does he stay? It's up to you.

If you want, comment any questions you have, and I'll answer them!

I must admit, after almost a year of this, I'm excited to start working on other fics! Also, my H2O fic is still going but on hiatus for the week, partly to mark LBAT ending and partly because I have a crochet project to finish.

End Notes

Me, slaps the roof of this AU: This bad boy can fit so much dark fluff in it.

Yes, Snow King isn't done yet. I still plan to finish it, I just wanted to work on this fic too.

If you're inspired to create anything based on this fic, art, writing, etc, go for it!

I love comments so much. Even if I don't reply, know that I appreciate comments and reading them makes me happy.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!